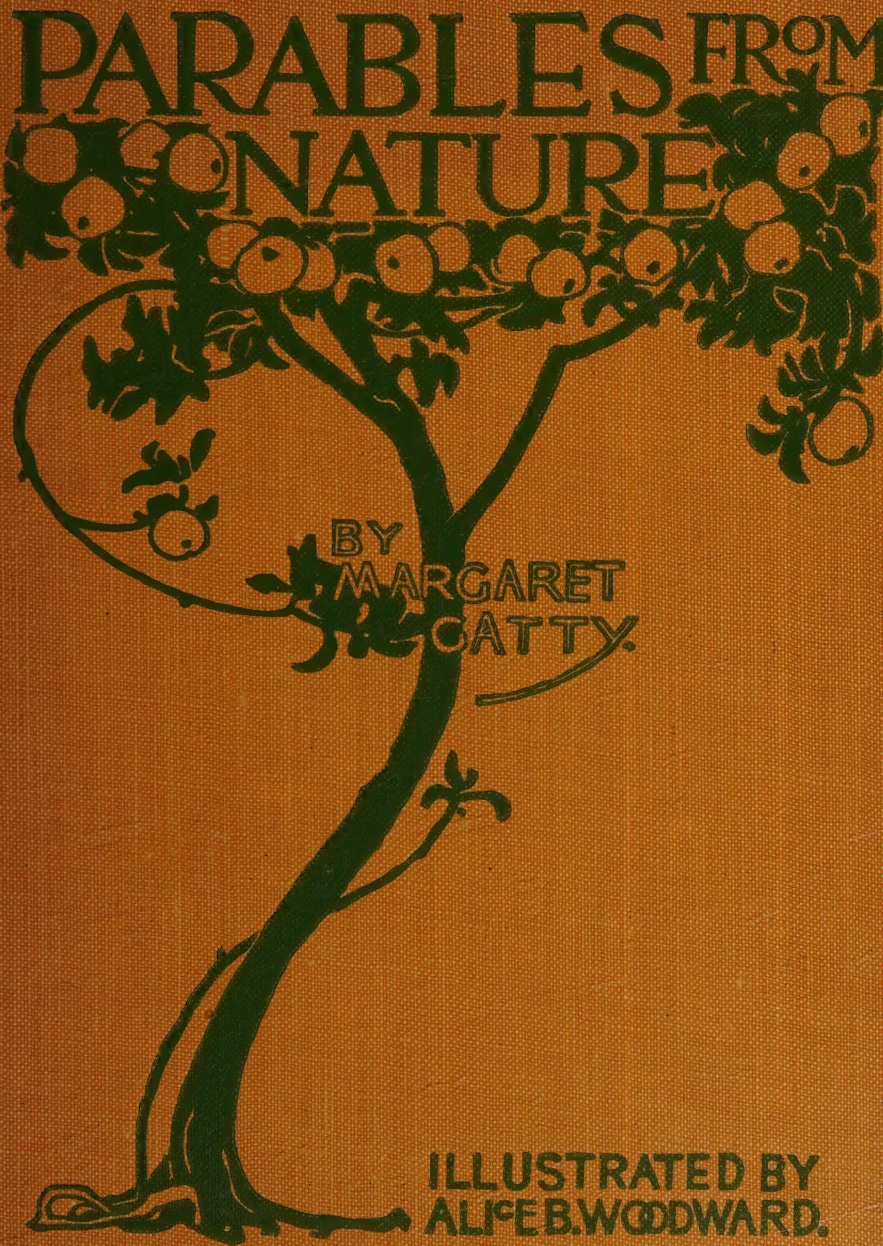


PARABLES FROM NATURE



BY
MARGARET
GATTY.

ILLUSTRATED BY
ALICE B. WOODWARD.

This book belongs to



Nature the old Nurse, took
The child upon her knee,
Saying: "Here is a story-book
Thy Father has written for thee."



Jan. 1st 1924

PARABLES FROM NATURE

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PARABLES FROM NATURE



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PARABLES FROM NATURE

A LESSON OF HOPE

“ Oh, yet we trust that, somehow, good
Will be the final goal of ill ! ”

TENNYSON'S “ *In Memoriam*.”

How the rising blast is driving through the ancient forest ! What a dismal roaring there is among the pine-trees ! What a sharp clattering among the half-dried poplar-leaves ! What a sighing among the beeches ! A wild mysterious hour, and full of strange fantastic types of mortal life !—

It was thus I spoke, when, having wandered out one gloomy autumn night to muse on Nature and her laws, I found myself contemplating, in the deep recesses of a wood, the progress of a violent storm. And as I paused, I leant back, in sad reflections lost, against an oak, and, looking upwards to the sky, tried to gaze into the depths of those black vapoury masses that had arisen, one knew not how or whence, to darken over the expanse of heaven ; when, all at once, there shone down upon me, from an opening in the clouds, the full rays of a bright October moon.

The light was sudden, and a sudden revulsion took place within my heart. I had been thinking that, like the cruel storm, and like the heavy clouds, were the troubles and the trials of human existence ; and now, when that sweet radiance broke upon my eyes, I heard a voice exclaim, as if in echo to my thoughts

—"It is the moon that shone in Paradise!" It was the Bird of Night, quite near me, in the hollow of a tree. Looking to see from whence the sound had come, I met his large, grave, meditative eyes fixed on my moonlit face, and then I heard the voice exclaim again—"The moon that shone in Paradise!"

Oh, what a thought to come across the tumult of that hour! *The moon that shone in Paradise!*—up to whose radiant orb the eyes of countless generations have been turned—from the first glance of spotless innocence, to the last yearning gaze of sorrow-stricken manhood! And why?—but that in that calm unchanging glory there shines forth a promise of eternal, everlasting peace. But now another voice was heard, despite the howling of the storm. It was a croaking Raven, swinging on a branch beside me. He came between me and the light, and ever and anon his coal-black wings seemed spreading for a flight.

"Deluded fool," he muttered, "with your endless myths! This comes of living in the dark all day, and spending all your time in guess-work! See! your precious moon is gone!"

"Not gone, though hidden," was the answer.

But I heard no more than this, for here the frightful wind grew louder still. He roared in fury all around, scattering the last leaves from the bending trees, as if he hated the very relics of the gentle summer. And many bowed their heads, and others moaned in grief.

"Hast thou come with mighty news from distant



"HE CAME BETWEEN ME AND THE LIGHT."

lands," shouted the Pine-tree scornfully, as he tossed his branches to the storm, "that thou bringest such confusion in thy path? Ambassador of evil, who has sent thee here?"

"Cannot yonder moon teach thee milder thoughts?" cried the Elm-tree, as he stood majestic in his sorrow and despair.

"Our hour is come," exclaimed the softer Beech. "My leaves lie scattered all around. Our life is closing fast. Naked and forlorn we stand amid the ruins of the past."

"What mockery of existence," stormed the black-leaved Poplar in his wrath, "to be placed here, and clothed in such sweet beauty, nurtured by gentle dews and tender sunshine, and then be left at last the victims of reckless fury, with all our glories torn by force away! Would I had never risen from the ground!"

"Oh, my aspiring friend," the ill-mouthed Raven cried, "the few months' splendour does not satisfy your heart! You aim too high, methinks. Well, well! aspiring thoughts are very fine; but were I you, I would accommodate myself to facts. A short spring, a shorter summer, and then to perish. Ha! here you are again, my ancient worthy friend!"

And then another gust broke in with savage fury on the forest, and many a stalwart branch crashed down upon the ground. The wailings of afflicted Nature rose amidst the storm.

"Is there no refuge from this end?" inquired the Oak. "Why have I lived at all?"

“Because destruction is the law of life,” the Raven uttered, with his fiercest croak. “Where would destruction be, were there no life to be destroyed? It is a glorious law.”

“No law, but only an exception,” cried the Bird of Night.

And as he spoke there streamed once more from out the clouds that type of peace that passeth not away—the moon that shone in Paradise. Oh, what a silver mantle she let fall upon the disrobed branches of those trees! Wet as they were with rain-drops, and waving in the gale, it seemed as if they shone in robes of starlight glory. What gracious promises seemed streaming down with that sweet light!

“Lift up your heads, ye forest trees, once more”; so sang the mild-eyed Bird of Night. “Fury is short-lived—love alone enduring. All that destroys is transitory, but order is everlasting. The unbridled powers of cruelty may rage—it is but for a time! And ye may darken over the blue heavens, ye vapoury masses in the sky. It matters not! Beyond the howling of that wrath, beyond the blackness of those clouds, there shines, unaltered and serene, the moon that shone in Paradise.”

“Your myth again, detested Bird of Night! Here to the rescue, ancient friend!”

And louder than ever came that cruel, cruel wind.

“It matters not,” once more the Owl exclaimed. “The stormy winds must cease, the clouds must pass

away, and yonder sails the light that tells of harmony restored."

"Infatuated fool, to live on hope, with death around you and before you!" groaned the Raven—and then a crash like thunder rent the air. A branch of the huge Oak had fallen to the ground. I started at the shock.

"Will the day ever come," I cried aloud, as if addressing some mysterious friend, "will the day ever come when storms and woe shall cease? Order and peace seem meant, but death and ruin come to pass."

"Oh, miserable doubter, do you ask? Must the brute beasts and mute creation rise to give an answer to your fears? Look in the heaven above, and in the earth below, and in the water deep beneath the earth. One only law is given—the law of order, harmony, and joy."

"Alas, how often broken!" I exclaimed.

"Ay, but disturbance is no law, and therefore cannot last. Disorder, death, destruction:—by their own nature they are transitory—rebellious powers that struggle for a time, and frustrate here and there the gracious purposes ordained. But they exist not of themselves; have neither law nor being in themselves; exist but as disturbers of a scheme whose deep foundations cannot be overthrown. Life, order, harmony, and peace; means duly fitting ends; the object, universal joy. This is the law. Believe in it, and live!"

And as the voice grew silent, from the sky beamed over all the scene the placid moon once more. The

wind had lulled or passed away to other regions of the earth, and over all the forest streamed the brilliant light. Once more the lit-up trees shone spangled o'er with rays ; and happy murmurs broke upon my ear, instead of loud complaints.

“ We have been wild and foolish, gracious moon ! ” exclaimed the tender Beech. “ We doubted all the promises and hopes you shed so freely down. In pity to the terrors of the night, forgive us once again ! ”

“ You have said right, my sister,” said the Oak. “ That heavenly power, whom neither winds nor storms can reach, will view with tenderness our troubled lot, who live amid the tempests of the earth. She will forgive, she hath forgiven us all. Hath she not clothed us now with robes more brilliant than the summer ones we love ? ”

“ The robes of hope and promise,” wept the Poplar, as he spoke, for all his branches trembled with delight, and stars seemed dropping all round.

“ I mourn my dark despair,” bewailed the Elm. “ I should have called the past to memory ! We never are deserted in our need. The winter tempests rage, and terrible they are ; but always the bright moon from time to time returns, to shed down rays of hope and promises of glory on our heads ; and still we doubt and fear, and still the patient moon repeats her tale. And then the spring and summer time return, and life, and joy, and all our beauteous robes. Oh, what weak tremblers we must be ! ”

And so, through all the rest of that strange night, murmurs of comfort sounded through the wood, and

I returned at last to the poor lonely cottage that I called my home, and wept mixed tears of sorrow and of joy. Father and mother lost, swept suddenly away, and I, with straitened means, left alone to struggle through the world ! Did I not stand before my desolate hearth, like one awakened from a dream, a vision—(surely such it was!)—exclaiming in despair, as did the weeping Beech, “ Naked and forlorn I stand amid the ruins of the past.” But through the casement glided in on me, me also, as I stood, the blessed rays of that eternal moon—the moon that shone in Paradise—the moon that promises a Paradise restored.

And ever and anon, throughout the struggle of my life, I would return for wisdom and for hope to the old forest where I dreamt the dream. As time passed on, and winter snows came down, a cold unmeaning sleep seemed to bind up the trees—but still, at her appointed time, the moon came out, and lit up even snow with robes of light and hope. And then the spring-time burst the cruel bonds that held all Nature in a stagnant state. Verdure and beauty came again ; and, as I listened to the gales that breathed soft music through the trees, I thought, “ If I could dream again, I should hear songs of exquisite delight.” But that was not to be. Still, I could revel in the comfort of the sight, and watch the moonbeams glittering in triumphant joy through the now verdant bowers of those woods, playing in happy sport amid the shadows of the leaves.

And to me also came a spring ! From me, too,

passed away the winter and its chill ! And now I take the children of my love, and the sweet mother who has borne them, to those woods ; and ever and anon we tell long tales of Nature and her ways, and how the poor trees moan, when storms and tempests come ; and how the wise Owl talks to heedless ears his deep philosophy of laws of order that must one day certainly prevail, and how the patient moon is never weary of her task of shedding rays of hope and promise on the world ; and even while we speak, the children clap their hands for joy, and say they never will despair for anything that comes, for, lo ! above their heads there suddenly shines out—THE MOON THAT SHONE IN PARADISE !



KICKING

“ Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.”—I SAM. xv. 23.

THREE years of complete liberty, and then to have to learn in three short weeks to submit entirely to the will of other people !

This sounds a hard plan of education, and perhaps is not the very best one possible. Still, thousands of young colts have turned into good horses upon it ; and if there is to be a reform, it must come from above, not from below. Reforms from below savour of rebellion, and that is sure to lead to a reaction the wrong way again.

Yet people ought not to blind themselves—those above, I mean, any more than those below. Every man, therefore, ought to sit from time to time in his neighbour's chair, and look with his neighbour's eyes, from his neighbour's position, at what he himself is about. It is wonderful how much wiser, as well as kinder, people grow if they do this.

And among a man's neighbours he should not be ashamed to reckon the creatures he collects round him for his own convenience and amusement, and calls his “ domestic animals.” Why “ domestic,” but that he has taken them from their own natural homes, and brought them to his ? And if so, surely it is not too much to ask that he should give them, each in his degree, the comforts of a home citizenship,

in return for the duties he exacts. If he does this honestly, a few errors of judgment on his part will not matter more than a few errors of conduct on theirs ; for imperfection has not only to be struggled against, but borne in this world.

Sitting in neighbour Firefly the spirited young chestnut colt's chair, then, it is but fair to own that he may well have felt it queer, after three years' luxury of doing as he liked in large grassy pastures, to find himself suddenly cooped up in a small square stuffy place, ceiled in instead of open to the air, and surrounded by walls, to one particular part of which he was fastened by a horrible contrivance that went round his head and neck, and gave him a most unpleasant pull whenever he tried to get away. But yesterday he was free as the wind, so far as the hedges extended—could gallop from one to the other while his breath lasted ; might snort at the passengers in the road which skirted the field as much as he pleased ; throw out his legs at everything and everybody ; kick, plunge, bound, jump till he was tired ; whinny at his companions, whether he had anything worth saying or not ; and all this at will ; while now—but the contrast is too painful to dwell upon, for Firefly was now in a horsebreaker's stable, with a halter round his neck.

He had one consolation, however, and it is not a small one to most people—indeed it ought always to be a matter of thankfulness to all—he was extremely well fed. It is true, the very delicious grain he had now been champing at three separate meals to his

heart's content, with his nose bent over the manger, had been very dearly purchased by the loss of his freedom the morning before. The wild driving he had undergone from the field to the stable-yard, with the treacherous capture at the end, still rankled in his mind, and the cruel outrage to his young heart's nervous shyness, when hands of violent men overcame him, and the fatal noose was slipped over his head, was not to be forgotten. Still taste is taste ; the food remained delicious all the same, and he was so young, he could enjoy the present, irrespective of the past or future.

But all feeds of corn come to an end at last ; and at the end of the first he began to fidget, after the second he grew angrily impatient, and when he had swallowed the third, he became what is called (archaically) *rampageous*, for in point of fact the good corn had begun to warm his blood. It was very high living compared to the cold grass he had been used to.

Now, as was natural, one of the first things he did was to call out for his old companions of the field, and this he did in colt's fashion, of course ; but what colt's fashion really is will not be known till men become good linguists, and have learnt other languages besides those of their own race. At present they are miserably backward in that branch of learning, and have no idea even of what flies talk about, though they hear them murmuring away in the air as soon as they themselves awake every summer morning, and for nearly all day after.

Well, in colt's fashion Firefly shouted for his com-

panions, and after two or three attempts, each of them louder than the one before, must have made himself heard ; for at last he was answered, though from what seemed a great distance, so smothered were the sounds. But this was only because they came through stone walls. In point of fact, his young friends, Whitefoot and Silverstar by name, were very near—namely, in the very next adjoining stable—both of them captives like himself ; both of them with halters round their necks, one in one stall, one in another.

Conversation was difficult under such circumstances, and could not be carried on long. What they did say, when they discovered they were near each other, amounted to about this :—

“ So you are somewhere hereabouts, too, Whitefoot and Silverstar. Why don’t you come where I am ? Where are you ? ”

“ We don’t know where we are. Where are you ? Why don’t you come to us ? ”

“ Because something twitches my head if I try to move away ; so I can’t.”

“ That’s just what happens to us ; so we can’t.”

“ It’s abominable ! ”

“ It’s very distressing.”

“ I wonder what it means ! I am very angry.”

“ We wonder, too, but it can’t be helped.”

Here the dialogue ended, for the colts were not the only inhabitants of the two stables. In the one, with Whitefoot and Silverstar, was a good-tempered, middle-aged, Welsh pony, known all over the coun-

try-side as good old Taffy. In the other, with Firefly, was an old, half-bred white Arabian mare, whose mother had been brought from the East.

Old people who talk to young ones should think of the young ones more than themselves. If they want to gossip and grumble, and let off vexed feelings, let them do it to each other. Life is very trying sometimes as age comes on, and those of the same age can understand the feelings of the age, and make allowance for the groanings of the natural man. But young creatures may easily be led away, by a few sad or passionate words, into believing all sorts of nonsense. I say, then, let old people unburden their personal feelings to each other, but never talk anything but useful sense, or pleasant nonsense, to a child.

Had the old white mare in the stable thought of this, it would have been better for Firefly—perhaps, at least, he would not have had the same encouragement to turn out unmanageable which she now gave him. For no sooner had he uttered the words, “I wonder what it means! I am very angry,” to his companions next door, than she shook her own halter till the rattle roused his attention, and then observed in a tone of melancholy which was of itself quite impressive:—“*I can tell you what it means, but I am afraid when you know you will not be less angry than now, but rather more.*”

Firefly’s quick blood ran quicker at the startling announcement.

“Oh, dear, what makes you say so? Who can you be?” cried he in excitement.

"One who ought to know something, if age and experience can instruct," answered the sorrowful old mare, adding, in a lower tone still, "or if unusual opportunities in early life have not been lost upon her."

"I am almost afraid of hearing, yet suspense is intolerable," cried Firefly. "Where am I? What is going to happen?"

"You are a prisoner, at the mercy of those who shut you up," answered the old mare, to whose monotonous existence the power of lashing a young colt up to indignation was rather an amusing novelty. "It is the first time this has happened to you, I suppose?"

"It is the first time I was ever made fast in this way," groaned Firefly. "If I was ever in an enclosure before, it was loose by my mother's side. My memory is confused so far back."

"I, too, had a mother once," murmured the old mare, Egeria; and her grief in thinking how long ago made her pause.

"Tell me about her," exclaimed Firefly; "what became of her? I want to know."

"What a tone you speak in!" answered Egeria. "You want to know! You forget you are a prisoner, and must learn to want nothing but what is given you."

"I shall never learn that," cried he; "and why am I a prisoner? tell me that."

"Because the people you belong to want to make you useful—useful to *them*, that is."

"And why must I be useful to them? Why may I not please myself as I have done before? What are *they* to me?"

"Ask *them*," said Egeria, coldly. "They will tell you—masters, superiors."

"You provoke me," cried Firefly, stamping into the straw at his feet. "Tell me why I am here, as you promised. My former history is short enough, as you shall hear. I——"

"Spare yourself the trouble," interrupted Egeria; "our histories in this country are all alike. We are left to ourselves for nearly three years, and are taught nothing; then our superiors get hold of us, by fright and force, and in three weeks make us learn everything they want."

"And then?" gasped Firefly.

"And then it depends upon the people into whose hands one falls, whether one is well or ill used."

"And you have borne all this in patience?" asked Firefly.

"I had no heart to act otherwise," sighed Egeria.

"I felt no spirit to resist."

"But I feel plenty of spirit, and *shall* resist," cried the young chestnut, straining against the halter as hard as he could bear, and dashing his legs against the sides of the stall, first on one side, then on the other.

"But what can you do?" whined Egeria, a little startled by his violence.

"Do?" shouted Firefly; "why I shall kick, kick, kick!" And each time he uttered the word he

struck out against the wooden partition between the stalls. Egeria began to be alarmed.

"I do not advise it," she said; "I assure you it will do no good. You had better bear it all as well as you can."

"Oh, that is all very well for those who can receive it, old lady," exclaimed Firefly: "I can't. I can't stand injustice; and, what's more, I won't. Why, my blood is boiling already. Only to think of the way they drove us along before they got us here. Of course, if I had known, I should never have left the field. And the still worse fright those men gave me when they all laid hold of me and threw this horrible thing over my head! It's all treachery and injustice from beginning to end."

"Ah! if we were but in my mother's country!" sighed Egeria.

"Why, what then?" inquired Firefly.

"Oh, my poor young friend, I'm afraid it will do more harm than good to tell you," said Egeria; "yet if you wish it so very much, I hardly know how to refuse."

The old goose, to consent to tell what she felt might do harm! But she was vain of knowing more than other people on the subject, which she really did. Besides which, she wanted to stop Firefly's kicking and plunging, by holding his attention. So said she—

"The people there—in the East, I mean—treat young colts quite differently from the people here. As soon as ever they can leave their mothers, they

are brought among the tents, where the men, women, and children live, and the women take care of them, and feed them, and pet them. So they get used to their masters from the first, and there is not the fright and horror and startling change to go through which we suffer so much from at the end of our first three years ; and so the halter, and teaching, and all that sort of thing, come much easier—though, of course, restraint is restraint everywhere. But, for pity's sake, don't begin to kick again," concluded Egeria, interrupting herself at the sound of renewed struggles on Firefly's part. " I have been telling you my mother's story to keep you quiet."

" Quiet ! " shouted the miserable colt. " I won't be quiet, to please anybody. How can I be quiet, when I want to get away from this savage country, and go to that other one—that East you talk of—where colts are properly managed ? "

" But, my dear young friend, consider—it's too late," expostulated Egeria. " You can't begin life over again. You really mustn't let your feelings run away with you in this foolish way. People here don't mean badly, altogether. They are tolerably kind, on the whole ; at least, some of them are. They feed you well, as you see ; and after you have learnt what they teach, you will be glad, though you won't like it while it's going on."

" Then it shan't go on ! " shouted Firefly. " They shan't teach me ! I won't learn ! I won't have their food, or their kindness ! If they had brought me up properly, I could have submitted as well as any-

body ; but they have been unjust, and now I won't ! I'll do something—I'll go to the East ; and if I can't go to the East, I'll kick ! ”

“ Oh, hush !—do, pray, hush ! ” said Egeria, who, to do her justice, had merely wanted to excite a sympathetic grumble, not to rouse a storm. “ You go much too far, I assure you.”

“ *You* say that, because you have no spirit, you poor old creature ! ” exclaimed Firefly. “ You know you hav'n't—you said so yourself, just now ; but that's no rule for me.”

“ If I have not much spirit,” remarked Egeria, “ I may have some sense, and I want you to have some too. You can't get away, to begin with—so the East is out of the question ; and you cannot resist these people to any purpose—so, take my advice, submit and have done with it. I can tell you, from long experience, that kicking is never of any use.”

“ Then I shall go on kicking, out of spite, *because* it's of no use,” cried Firefly ; and as he announced this grand resolution, he broke out all over into a profuse sweat from excitement.

At which moment the stable-door opened, and the horsebreaker stepped in, just to have a look at the colt ; and after doing so, and observing his irritable and uneasy condition, said he to himself, “ I shall have a good deal of trouble with *this* one, I'm afraid.”

Now, in saying this, he was making a sort of comparison between Firefly and the other two ; for he had just been in the next stable, and seen Whitefoot

and Silverstar unusually placid and quiet—for fresh-caught colts, that is to say ; nobody expects from a kitten the gravity of a cat. But what wonder ? Besides that they were greys, and therefore easier-tempered by nature than was to be expected from a chestnut (for in horses, colour and disposition are apt to go together), they had been hearing nothing but good advice ever since they were shut up—and, what is more, they had actually been attending to it !

But, then, good old Taffy gave his good old advice in such a very pleasant way ! “ My dear friends,” cried he, when he heard them plunging about in their stalls at first, “ I do feel so sorry for you—so very, very sorry—because I know so well what you suffer. Just the same was done with me when I was your age.”

“ Oh, how did you bear it ? ” asked the colts.

“ Well, well, I was very impatient just at the beginning,” answered Taffy ; “ for my Welsh blood made me chafe at the confinement, and I was alone, and had nobody to explain the meaning of it all to me, so it was hard work ; and this makes me particularly glad to be here just now to help you. I can tell you a great deal that will comfort you, and plenty more that will surprise and amuse you very much. There are two sides to everything, even to things that vex one, I assure you ! But, quiet !—quiet ! dear friends, I do beg,” continued he, as he heard more plunging and shaking of halters, “ or I shall not be able to say another word ! ”

“ We will be quiet,” cried the colts, for they liked the idea of being surprised and amused, as who does not ?

Then Taffy told them they were not brought here to be teased to death, as they had perhaps supposed, but to prepare them for being taught a thousand nice things which they would never be able to do, if they were not taught, and which it was immensely jolly to be able to do, when the teaching was once over ; and he proceeded to hold forth on the pleasures of trotting, cantering, and galloping over the country, with a good feed of corn, a comfortable stable, and a valet to rub one down at the end ; as also the delightful excitements of racing and hunting, which even he had enjoyed, though only as a looker-on ; but he added, that they couldn’t have a share in all this, without first learning to obey their masters, and love them a little bit too.

Whereupon both colts shuddered all over, for their horror of the men who had shut them up was very great, and love seemed perfectly impossible.

“ Ah ! you can’t bear the thought of this, I see,” cried Taffy. “ Well, of course, if it could be, one would like to have no master but oneself—eh, my friends ? ”

To which both Whitefoot and Silverstar agreed, with a whinny of satisfaction.

“ But what is the use of fretting oneself, by wishing for what can’t be ? ” pursued Taffy. “ These men and women are, though I don’t know how, or why, our masters and superiors, and I know from my own

experience, that we are happiest when we submit to their wishes with a good grace ; when we struggle and resist we are miserable."

" But suppose they wish something cruel and unjust ? " sighed Silverstar.

" But who is to decide what is so ? " asked Taffy in return. " Many things seem so that are not ; your being here against your will, for instance—you will be so glad about it by-and-by, when the teaching is finished."

" It is comfortable to hear that," murmured Silverstar.

" Is the teaching itself very unpleasant ? " asked Whitefoot.

" *Very*," cried Taffy at once, at the mere recollection of it, and the colts shuddered again. " But here I am," he continued, " none the worse, and all the better, and as happy as possible, with a man or woman, or a little child on my back three or four times a week, and a pet with all the family. Oh ! you have no notion how good-natured these men very often are—bringing one tit-bits both in the stable and field—bread, or apples, or carrots, or clover, which one takes out of their hands. But for pity's sake don't begin kicking again," cried he, as he heard them flinging wildly about, at the notion of men coming so near. " Why, you surely wouldn't kick at kindness ? You must meet it half-way, when it's offered, you foolish fellows, or you may live to want it before you die ! But, don't alarm yourselves ! You won't be able to be on these intimate

terms with masters and superiors, till you've learnt to be well-mannered and obedient. But my experience tells me they are kind when we are good ; and where they seem otherwise, I try to believe it is because we don't understand the meaning of what they are doing ;—with superiors one can't expect that one should."

A word spoken in season, how good is it ! The colts grew calmer and calmer as Taffy went on, and when, in conclusion, he told them a story about a good-natured lady, who used to bring him handfuls of oats in reward of a pretty trick he learnt of opening the stable-door with his nose, they half began to believe that these men and women were not, after all, such dreadful creatures as they had supposed.

And as it was just then that the horsebreaker entered the stable to look at them, it is not to be wondered at that they bore his presence with only about half the horror they would otherwise have felt, and so kept tolerably quiet.

And thus a week went on, Taffy encouraging them by his own example and experience, to bear what was coming with patience and in hope.

And he could but speak from his own experience, poor Taffy ! Let us trust, then, that in these " days of advance " there are fewer and fewer exceptions to the rule, that a docile horse makes a kind master. Shame on the master if it does not !

It was at the end of the first week that the real trial began for all three colts, and a trial indeed it was ! They have hard hearts who would deny it.

Those heavy iron bits forced into the young, tender mouths ; so stiff against their teeth, so cold against their flesh, how horrible they were ! And the bridles that pulled at them, forcing the poor heads to turn hither and thither, for mere whim's sake, as it seemed (for whatever reason there was for it, *they* could not find it out)—what a cruel contrivance ! Then the long whips, which kept them at one distance all the time, so that, as they were forced to move on continually, they had no choice but to go round and round in a circle for ever—how irritating ! My heart bleeds when I think of it, and imagine the two long hours of struggle on that first dreadful day. How severe the trial must have been to them—must ever be to all !

Worse still, however, when in the course of a few days, the corners of the mouths became sore from the pressure of the iron, and there was, for a time, the pain of a raw wound, as well as a day-by-day longer time of restraint to endure.—Masters and superiors, verily, there is a great responsibility in your hands ! Nevertheless, it is not for the colts to sit in judgment.

Now then, how fared the three colts under the terrible but, at present, in some way or other, necessary training ? (For even Egeria could not answer Firefly's maddened inquiries, by saying that in the East the bit and bridle and whip can be dispensed with.) Well, Whitefoot and Silverstar set out by intending to submit if possible, and therefore, though more or less cheerfully at some times than

others, and with more or less pain to themselves, they contrived to manage it at last.

Firefly, on the contrary, started by a sort of resistance-on-principle plan. Wishing to resist, in fact, he always found a reason for resisting. If people treated him properly he could submit as well as any one else, he was sure ; but if they ill-used him, what could they expect but that he should kick—kick—kick ? And as to what proper treatment was, he made himself the sole judge. Certainly the training process just described was not proper, but on the contrary, cruel and unjust, and accordingly kick, kick, kick he went, whenever it was possible.

In vain Egeria begged him to forbear, seeing too late how much mischief her folly had done.

“ It is so senseless to resist when you can’t help yourself,” said she.

“ It is so mean to yield to an unjust necessity ! ” cried he.

And she dared not contradict herself so far as to suggest that it might not be so unjust as it seemed.

“ Will you listen to me once more ? ” asked she, one day.

“ If you talk sense, yes,” replied Firefly, “ not otherwise, old lady.”

Egeria sighed ; for his pert folly was but a stretched-out shadow of her own. Imperfect judgment ; judgments formed on half-known grounds ; judgments formed by the lesser intelligence concerning a greater which it cannot comprehend—what rebellion and ruin have they not caused !

"It is sense, if you have sense to find it out," cried Egeria, sharply. "It is downright wisdom. What I am going to say is truth and fact."

"I hear you ; go on," said Firefly, impatiently.

"Well, if you go on kicking in this manner, every time you think you have—I beg your pardon—every time you have a reason for kicking, you know, you will get into such a habit of kicking, that you will do it whether you have a reason or not ! "

"Shall I ! " shouted Firefly, with contempt.

"Yes, you *will* though ! " persisted Egeria, vexed alike by his obstinacy and ridicule. "If you kick every time you can find or make an excuse, you will be very apt to kick on when you have none."

"I have never yet kicked without a reason, old lady, and I don't intend to do so," answered Firefly.

"I know, I know," replied Egeria, "so far you have always proved yourself right *to yourself* : what the horsebreaker thinks is another matter. But, dear friend, try and believe me,—habits are such tremendous things ! If you don't get into a habit of giving way, you mayn't be able to give way when you want, that's what I am afraid of. Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear."

"How can that happen to me, when I never kick without a reason ? " cried Firefly.

At which moment he was fetched from the stable for a morning's lesson, and Egeria was left to fret alone. For fret she did, not being a bad creature on the whole, but such an inconsiderate old simpleton,

both in her way of viewing life and talking about it to others !

And alas ! there was but too much cause for fretting when at the end of five weeks Firefly remained still untamed—still in the horsebreaker's hands ! A fortnight ago both Whitefoot and Silverstar had taken leave of the place, had finished their education with respectability, and gone out into the world on their own account. There are plenty of good masters to be found for docile, well-taught creatures, and they had been picked up at once by two neighbouring families, and often met in their rides, and talked over old times. Egeria heard of this from Taffy, who, from being constantly out, learnt all the news of the countryside, and had once or twice met his friends himself ; and it must be owned she regretted Firefly's conduct all the more, that she feared she had had some share in it herself.

When Firefly was led out of the stable after Egeria had spoken, he had, for a few minutes, a misgiving that there might be some truth in what she had said. But the first crack of the horsebreaker's whip made his heart as hard as ever. He had accustomed himself for so long to look upon it, and him, and the whole affair, as a system of barbarous injustice, that he could not have rid himself of the notion without a strong effort, and there was one great difficulty to his making it—namely, that he must acknowledge himself to have been in the wrong before. And alas ! he did not make it ; and so another week went on, at the end of which the horsebreaker lost patience,

and told Firefly's owner he was a hopeless kicker, and a very ill-conditioned animal as to temper, though otherwise with many good points, and a valuable beast.

It was not very pleasant news to the owner, but Firefly was so handsome in appearance, and moreover, so strong and able to work, that he was undertaken at last by a very fearless young squire, who cared for little but pace and beauty, had a seat like a rock, put his faith in a strong curb, and had no scruple in using his spurs.

What Firefly underwent in his hands I do not wish to describe, though, even there, if he would but have submitted, his fate would not have been bad, for if the master loved galloping, so did Firefly himself. But again and again he would refuse to obey the curb, if it checked or turned him suddenly when his face was set elsewhere ; and then like an instinct came the impulse to kick, kick, kick ! and he followed it. For an hour sometimes the two would battle together—the spur and the whip and the curb, against that insane determination to kick, kick, kick ! And as to be conquered by main force and exhaustion is not to be reformed, Firefly was led away bleeding and foam-covered to his stable, as savage as when he left it, and still repeating the old strain, “ If people treat me properly, I can submit as well as any one else ; but if they don't, what can they expect but that I shall kick, kick, kick ? ” Like the horsebreaker's whim of driving him round in an everlasting circle, seemed the young squire's whim

of checking him, and turning him round when he didn't expect it, and wanted to go straight on. He kicked, therefore, strictly on principle, and all the more when the injustice was enforced by the spur and the lash. So the squire got tired of his purchase, and Firefly was sold again.

But this time to a very knowing hand, a country doctor, who after trying different plans in turn—low feed and good feed, kindness and severity, and finding both unsuccessful, took him back to the horsebreaker. "He seems very hopeless at present," remarked he; "he kicks for nothing. But there is one more chance. Break him in for harness. Kicking-straps will perhaps bring him to his senses. At any rate try; he has many good qualities, and is a fine fellow. I hope he'll do well."

The horsebreaker shook his head, and led Firefly back to his old stable. Another colt occupied his former stall, but there were still two vacant. He was led into the middle one, and before nightfall Egeria was brought into the third.

Firefly told his story at length, and was too eager to hear Egeria's shuffles of impatience. "How unfortunate some people are!" observed she, when he ended; but there was a slight mockery in her tone.

"I have been so all along," said he; "I believe I am fated to ill-usage."

"People always are who will go nobody's way but their own," was Egeria's answer; "why don't you do what is wanted? Go the way your master pulls you, and give up fighting for your own."

"If people treat me properly, I can submit——"

"Oh, do stop!" cried Egeria, "I've heard that much too often. You never *do* submit."

"Because they never——"

"Oh, they, they, they! Would they be masters, if you, and not they, were to lead the way?"

"Oh, as to *masters*, perhaps I have my own opinion," cried Firefly; "I wonder who has been master of the two *I* have had! But no matter about that. I could have borne leading, but I wouldn't be dragged. It was the curb and spurs and whip of that young squire I kicked against."

"And of your last master, the doctor, when he was kind?" asked Egeria.

"He wasn't always kind," muttered Firefly.

"But when he was?" insisted the old mare.

"Fool!" murmured Firefly, between his teeth; "was I likely to go his fidgetty way—stopping at one house, then at another; no sooner started than having to stop; twisted down one lane and up another, never having a good run all the time; I, who had galloped over half a country-side in a morning with the squire? Kick! why who wouldn't kick at a life like that?"

"It is as I feared," exclaimed Egeria. "Anybody who wants to kick can find a reason for it, of course." And she spoke not another word, for she did not understand the matter to the bottom, as Taffy did; and so her way of argument was not convincing.

The first thing in the morning, however, Firefly spoke to her. He had a question to ask. Did she

know what *kicking-straps* were? Perfectly; what made him want to know?

He repeated what the doctor had said.

"Capital," said Egeria. "If you are put into those you will never be able to kick again."

"We shall see about that," groaned Firefly, grinding his teeth as if he were champing oats. "Masters—masters—masters, indeed! . . ."

In which state of mind he was taken out, two hours afterwards, put into kicking-straps, and had his first lesson of going in harness. The plan answered at first; but this was only while the shock of surprise and helplessness lasted. Still, being rather less wild, the horsebreaker returned him as "fit for harness, if driven in kicking-straps;" and Egeria twitted him when he left her, as being "fairly caught at last." "We shall see about that," muttered Firefly, fuming to himself, as the doctor drove him home. But the kicking-straps were amazingly strong, and he restrained himself. Nevertheless, the first principles of submission had not entered his head, and Egeria's folly and ridicule had done all that an unwise friend could do to confuse the truth.

The truth? Ah, we can only get at that by sitting in our neighbour's chair, and looking with his eyes. Had Firefly done this, he would have known why the kicking-straps were added to his harness, and have laid the blame on the right shoulders. As it was, he laid the blame on the doctor, and considered himself the victim of injustice.

So, one unlucky day, after a round of rather tire-

some visiting, a very slight correction for impatience, set his blood working ; and, without thinking either of kicking-straps or consequences, he took the bit between his teeth, laid his ears down, close to his head, muttering, " Masters, indeed ! " to himself, and pulling madly at the reins, dashed at full speed down the narrow country-lane. They stopped him at last at a turnpike-gate, and as the kicking-straps had given way soon after he started, he concluded the day's work by smashing the splashboard to pieces, his master escaping with difficulty.

So he was sent back to the market-town and resold.

It is impossible to pursue him through all his adventures ; they were all, so to speak, variations upon the same set of notes—the battle of authority with one who refused to acknowledge its claims. A miserable struggle, whether of man or beast ; whether against the powers ordained of God, or the God of power Himself ; whether breaking out into open contest, or indulged in by inward repining.

At last, poor Firefly fell into the hands of a regular horsedealer, who forwarded him to a neighbourhood where his tricks were not known, and, after some weeks of low diet and constant work, sold him (more shame for the fact) to a quiet country clergyman, for a birthday present to his daughter, just bursting into the beauty of girlhood.

Now, by this time, our friend Firefly had had experience enough to discover that his habit of opposition was constantly bringing him into trouble. And though he was not sick of the bad habit, he was

decidedly sick of the trouble, and every now and then was vexed with himself for giving way to it. And now and then he recalled Egeria's words, "Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear." Still, he could not remember a single case in which he had kicked without a very good reason—as it seemed to him:—so he assured himself at least, and tried to forget that Egeria had also said, "Anybody who wants to kick can find a reason for kicking, of course!"

Now at last, however, came Firefly's halcyon days. What more could heart of horse desire than to belong to a gentle young girl, who was ready to love him, not only as her servant, but companion and friend? Egeria's tales of Eastern kindness came back to his mind again and again, as his new mistress brought him delicate morsels which she would fain have him eat from her hand; and when, as was generally the case, he could not overcome his repugnance, but started back from her caresses, all she said was, the poor fellow was nervous and shy; perhaps—who knew?—he had at some time or other been harshly used.

"This is as it should be," remarked Firefly; and he began to think better than ever of himself. The few misgivings he had lately had went to sleep. "*I* was right, and not Egeria," thought he, as he bore his light burden over her favourite haunt, the Downs, "I was right, and Egeria wrong. I told her I had never kicked without a reason, and never should. It was nonsense about not being able to leave off."

And so he really believed, till, alas ! the renewed good living brought back the impatience as well as fire into his blood, and what had he to restrain them with, who had not got the law in his heart ? There followed one other week of self-confidence and enjoyment, and then . . .

. . . She was not in the least to blame—that beautiful young girl who had been so kind to him. He admitted this even to himself, when he saw her stretched at his feet ; the eyes that had looked so kindly at him, closed ; the rich black hair surrounding the white cheeks and forehead like a pall—a groom so horror-struck when he came up, that he never thought of even laying hold of Firefly's bridle.

They had been out for a morning ride on the Downs, and she had wished to canter. For a day or two past, some evil spirit (evil spirits are so ingenious) had been whispering in his ear, that to be patronised was all very well, if it were not another form of unjust restraint. Masters ? had he not proved himself the master in every case yet ? And so he had done here—here, where, as Egeria had prophesied, he would have given worlds to forbear. Now rose before him the only half-valued tenderness, the anxiety for his daily comfort, the little personal sacrifices in his favour, and this as the conclusion : that because the canter had been prolonged, and she had wished to rest, and so checked him with the bridle, the old habit had proved too strong for him, and prompted him to kick, kick, kick !—and he had kicked till she was stretched at his feet. . . .

More than an hour passed, and Firefly stood by her still. Stood in the same spot, seeing the same sight, without care to go his own way, now that he might have done it at will.

And then came the trampling of feet, horses, and other men, and among them all a father in the first agony of despair. And no one noticed Firefly—he was nothing to his masters then, and so he stood on there like a horse of marble, in the same old place, looking at what he had done.

But presently some one who had been touching her wrist, and had sprinkled her with water, whispered, “She is coming to herself!”

And it was true. Firefly’s mistress had been stunned, and one arm was hurt, but she awoke again to life; and when the poor father had wept out his joy on her neck, and she had looked up, she smiled to see so near them the creature who had caused this evil. Yes, there he stood, and his eye watched hers, as it first glanced at him, and then fixed on her father’s face anxiously, while she murmured, “Promise me one thing, dear father. Let poor Firefly go to Rarey to be cured.”

Masters?—*They* may well be masters and superiors in whom the abiding spirit of forgiveness and love is triumphant! So Firefly was taken to Rarey; but what then happens to horses must be looked for in other books. This does not contain an argument on the merits of the different methods of horsebreaking; only this much as regards Rarey’s process is the turning point of the tale. The object aimed at is the

subjection of the will, not merely the control of the body,—the full and complete recognition of the mastership and superiority of man. This, and this only, is what is wanted when the legs are tied up, and struggles rendered powerless by force, so that the indignant animal is brought through exhaustion of body to submission of feeling. He has plunged, he has kicked, he has reared, for hours together, if he will have it so ; but the man stands by him unscathed, unruffled, and still kind :—his master and superior—the terrible discipline proves it ; but still kind—and the kindness proves it too.

All this Firefly went through ; and when the Rarey-breaker “ gentled ” him all over his miserable frame, as he lay panting and overpowered on the sawdust, conquered and convinced at last, all his mistakes and misconceptions of other people came before him, as plainly as if Taffy himself had spoken them ; so plainly, that he wondered at himself. But remembering his old and all-too-firmly-adhered-to resolution to kick, kick, kick, whenever he was vexed, a fresh outbreak of perspiration astonished the breaker so much, that he “ gentled ” and soothed the troubled spirit more and more tenderly, till Firefly could think of nothing like it but the father and daughter comforting each other on the Downs, that terrible day of his guilt.

And thus at last, he learnt that it was possible for submission and love and happiness to go hand in hand together. Firefly was cured.

And then he was taken back to a home which he

helped in his degree, however humble, to make what a home should be ;—a circle in which animals, superior and inferior, should all work together, each after its measure and kind, for the comfort and pleasure of all.

At last, therefore, he gave a willing obedience to every touch of his dear young lady's rein ; and yet he feared her no longer as before ; and yet he loved her more ! Which is a great mystery, but the world repeats it in a thousand forms.

Animals under man—servants under masters—children under parents—wives under husbands—men under authorities—nations under rulers—all under God,—it is the same with all :—in obedience of will is the only true peace.

Happy the colts who learn submission without a lifetime of personal struggle ! Happy the men and women who find in the lesser obediences a practice-field of the greater ; for assuredly the words of Egeria are true : “ Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear.”



RED SNOW

“ Or tu chi se', che vuoi sedere a scranna,
 Per giudicar da lungi mille miglia
 Con la veduta corta d'una spanna ? ”—DANTE.

“ And who art thou, that on the stool wouldst sit
 To judge at distance of a thousand miles,
 With the short-sighted vision of a span ? ”
 CARY'S *Translation*.

LITTLE Siegfried, the widow's son, climbed day by day up the hill which overlooked his mother's cottage, and rambled about on the top, running after birds and insects, and gathering the beautiful wild-flowers that grow on the Swiss Alps.

There the dark blue gentians, and the Alpine rose, as it is called, and campanulas and salvias, are almost as common as the cowslips and daisies of English fields, and, from the brightness of their colours, make the hill-sides look like gardens, instead of uncultivated ground.

Little Siegfried's father had been killed in battle, some months before his child's birth, and so, when he came into the world, he was cradled in tears instead of smiles ; and what wonder if he grew up less thoughtless and gay than other boys of his age.

It was his mother who had first shown Siegfried where to climb the hill, and where to find the finest flowers ; and had made him look at the hills still

higher than their own, by which their valley was enclosed, and had pointed out to him Mont Blanc in the distance, looming like a shadowy giant in the sky.

For thus and thus had her husband shown her all these things, during the few happy months of their marriage, before he was called away to the wars ; and on the same heights where the child now roamed after flowers, his parents had sat together among them, in quiet summer evenings, sometimes talking, sometimes reading, always praising God for the happiness He was permitting them to enjoy.

But having thus led her child to the spot so fondly endeared to herself, and bidden him rejoice in the sights and scenes of Nature, and told him of the protecting God of goodness who ruled over all, the widowed mother went back alone to her cottage, to weep out in secret her re-awakened grief. Siegfried, meanwhile, amused himself on the flowery heights, his new play-ground ; and after he had gathered for his mother the nosegay she had asked him to bring, he lay down on the soft turf, and looked around at the hills, and up to the snowy sides of the huge Mont Blanc (of which he could see so much more here than down in the valley below), till it took possession of his fancy as something wonderful and grand ; something far beyond the flowers, bright and lovely as they were.

And ever afterwards, day by day, when he had had enough of chasing and rambling, he used to lie down in the same place, and look at the hills in the same

way, that he might feel again what he had felt at first.

Yet he found no sameness in the sight. The clouds that sometimes lifted themselves up from, and at other times came down over, the mountain, were never quite alike. The shadows that flitted across it varied from day to day in their shape and size and course ; and the sunshine that broke over it was of many different tints, and lit it up in a thousand different ways. At one time it was wrapt in a silvery haze ; at another the air became so clear, that the child could see the glittering of the snow atoms, as they seemed to dance in and out, like the stars in the sky.

So Siegfried never wearied of watching the huge mountain, but got to love it more and more, with a love mixed with respectful awe, and a feeling as if it had some sort of life and consciousness.

At last, one day, when his mother was putting his little basket in his hand, that he might go on the hill as usual to play, he asked her if he might go to the top of Mont Blanc instead, and if she would show him the way.

It was no wonder that the good widow smiled, as she told him that neither he nor she were able to climb up such a terrible mountain. But she did smile ; and although she noticed how the little face flushed over as she spoke, she thought, naturally enough, that this was because of his disappointment. So, kissing him lovingly, she said, " You must be a great strong man, Siegfried, before you can scramble

up the heights of Mont Blanc ; and even for great strong men the way is very dangerous. And even if you were there, you would find nothing but cold and snow and misery ; neither life nor flowers : our own hills are as pleasant again."

So Siegfried went away with his basket ; but instead of running about and picking flowers, he threw himself at once upon the ground, and looked at the mountain, and cried, for he felt very sorry at what his mother had said. Presently, however, he wiped his eyes, and looked again ; then sprang up and stared before him as if surprised. All the distance was bathed in bright sunshine, and the air was more transparent than usual, and, lo ! a round rosy-coloured patch was visible on the far-off snows. He had never seen it before. What could it be ? He thought he knew ; and running hastily down to the cottage, threw open the door, and shouted in delight, " Mother ! there is a rose on Mont Blanc ! "

Siegfried's mother did not laugh now, for she saw the child was excited ; and she was grieved for him. Ah ! he had only half the love that should have been his ; she must console him as best she could ; he was not like other boys, she knew—and thinking this, she took him on her knee, and tried to explain to him that it *must* be only some accidental light from the sky that caused the rosy patch, for that no vegetation of any kind grew on the sides of the snowy mountain ; there could be no roses there ; and she knew that it often looked pink in the evening sun—only now it was not evening.



A ROSY-COLOURED PATCH WAS VISIBLE ON THE FAR-OFF SNOW.

Siegfried was silent for a few seconds, and hung down his head ; but presently he murmured out, " Why ? "

" Ah, Siegfried ! " cried the mother, " is it not enough that God chooses it to be so ! It is He who sends the everlasting snows there, and the flowery herbage here."

" I am very sorry for the mountain," persisted little Siegfried, sadly ; so sadly that his mother grieved for the fanciful child, and asked should she go up with him again to the hill, and see the rosy patch on the snow herself ? On which the smiles came back to Siegfried's face, and they went away together very happily, and with the basket as usual ; for, said the mother, " You came back empty-handed to-day, Siegfried, and brought me no flowers."

But, by the time they reached the old spot, heavy mists had come down over the landscape, and neither Mont Blanc nor its rosy patch could be seen. Even Siegfried laughed at the journey they had had for nothing, and, after filling his basket, was contented to return home ; but in doing so, he began to talk again.

" If we had fewer flowers, Mother, we should be quite as happy, and then the great mountain could have some too. I wish God would make things equal."

" Hush, little Siegfried, hush ! " cried his mother in a half whisper ; " God has a right to do what He pleases, and we must not dispute about it, nor wish it otherwise. He chooses that there shall be desolate

places as well as pretty ones in the world ; outcast ends of the earth, as it were, which nobody seems to care for, as well as happy valleys. I am afraid it is the same with human beings—men and women, I mean—which is much worse. I am afraid there are many outcasts, God-deserted men, as well as desolate mountains. But you are too young to understand such things.”

The mother sighed as she spoke. Verily, she did not understand such things herself.

And so they walked on a few steps farther, and then the boy began again.

“ At any rate, the top of the mountain is nearer Heaven than our hill, Mother. It goes right into the blue.”

“ No, no,” cried the widow, passionately ; “ it only looks to be so. It is no nearer the real Heaven than we are. If it were, oh ! would I not have gone there long ago, at the risk of life itself ! ”

The child looked up surprised at his mother, for she spoke in tones very unusual to her ; and seeing how sad her face was, he wondered to himself if she also, were fretting that Mont Blanc was so miserable and forlorn.

And, snatching the nosegay from the basket, he flung the flowers as far into the air as he could, exclaiming, “ There ! I wish you had wings, and would fly away to the mountain, and make it look beautiful, too ! ”

Nothing more was spoken between them, but after little Siegfried had said his evening prayers, and

gone to bed, and while the mother was sitting alone in the chamber below, she heard a sound of sobbing ; and, going upstairs, found the boy crying bitterly ; the only account he could give of which was, that he could not help thinking about the poor outcast, God-deserted mountain.

Now, it was not the mountain she had called God-deserted. That was his own disturbed idea ; a confusion he had got into from what his mother had said. But how hard this was to explain ! How painful to touch the chords of a subject which jarred so cruelly against the natural hopes and faith of a gentle heart !

How difficult also for one who had known the stern realities of sorrow, to “ feel along ” the more delicate “ line ” of an infant’s dreamy griefs !

He was soothed by degrees, however, and after she left him, her thoughts soon wandered away from what she felt to be his fanciful troubles about the desolate mountain, to her own struggles with her desolate heart.

The next day was Sunday, and Siegfried was able to walk to the somewhat distant church, and even to repeat a few of the prayers, and listen, now and then, to bits of the sermon, when his mother thought there was something he could understand, and drew his attention to it.

But on this particular day there was no need for her to call his attention to the preacher ; nay, had she been able, she would have been very glad to have prevented his hearing him at all. But how could he help hearing when the pastor, addressing his flock,

asked if there was a single one, young or old, among them, who had not gazed hundreds and hundreds of times at the giant mountain of their land—the snow-covered, inaccessible heights of Mont Blanc ?

Siegfried and his mother looked at each other, and his heart leapt within him, to think that now, at last, he should hear something about his mysterious friend ; and, clasping his mother's hand tightly in his own, he listened for every word.

But, alas ! for what he heard. The pastor, after describing the mountain in all the magnificence of its size and form, painted it as being, nevertheless, the region of hopeless desolation ; the abode of everlasting lifelessness and despair. Cold, hard, insensible, what could rouse it from its death-like torpor ? The life-giving sun shone upon it from day to day, from age to age ; but no influence from its rays ever penetrated that frozen bosom. The dews fell upon it, the storms burst over it, equally in vain. Unmoved, it lifted up its gloomy crest to Heaven, as if defying its very Maker to touch the stony depths and bid the waters flow, or warm and soften them into life and gladness !

Siegfried was already in tears, but what followed was still worse, for the pastor now called upon his congregation to consider whether there was not something in the moral world of which the insensible mountain was but the too faithful type ? And then he answered himself, Yes !—the hardened human heart, the wicked natural heart, the Pharaoh-heart of the multitude, on which the sunshine of Divine

Grace and the storms of Divine Wrath were equally poured out in vain.

Yet, that "offences must needs come," he was well aware ; that such God-deserted beings as he had spoken of, must come up and be cut down, he knew : "vessels of wrath appointed to destruction." But, oh ! might none of the congregation now before him be of the number of those lost ones ! Might all there present take warning henceforth, as they turned their eyes to the stiff-necked hill of their native country, and flee from the wrath of the Lamb ! . . .

Siegfried's sobs had by this time become so uncontrollable, that the neighbours were disturbed ; and the widow thought the best thing she could do, was to rise up and leave the church with her child.

There was no use in arguing with him ; he was both too young and too much distressed ; added to which, his mother was scarcely less pained by the stern words than he was.

She, too, could have wept to think of "vessels of wrath appointed to destruction," and longed to hope against hope for the world of her fellow-creatures. In the material world she had but little interest, for she knew but little about it, and had not sufficiently considered the text which says that "God's mercy is over *all* His works" ; not limited to one class of creatures, or even to one sort of life.

Feeling as she did, therefore, she entered into no discussion with her boy, but through the long evening contrived to divert his mind, by reading him pleasant stories of good people who had lived in

favour with God, and had died full of hope and peace.

Nevertheless, Siegfried's last thought, as he fell asleep, was not of comfort and joy in the righteous, but of pity and almost love for all the wretched things for whom there seemed no hope.

The next day, his mother would fain have persuaded him to remain below in the valley, and seek some new amusement, but finding she could not reconcile him to the idea of forsaking his favourite haunt, she gave way, though with a sigh ; and so, after his little daily tasks and helps to her were ended, he climbed up the heights as usual.

It was well that he had promised his mother to tease her no more about the matter. Otherwise, on that day, he would have made more fuss than ever, for, when the sun was at the highest, the rosy flush reappeared on the distant snow, only not now confined to one small patch, but spread in broad tracts of delicate colour, which threatened to cover the whole mountain with its Aurora-like tint.

Once or twice Siegfried's resolution to keep his promise nearly gave way, but he held out manfully even to the last, contenting himself, on his return into the valley, with inquiring of a neighbour's son, whom he met driving home his father's cattle, why some of the snow on the hills looked pink ? At first the boy said he didn't know, but presently he recollected that he had heard it said, that red snow fell sometimes out of the sky. Very likely that was it ; but what it was, or what became of it, he had no notion. Only it went

away as it came. Nothing ever stopt on the hill but the snow that was always there.

Hearing this, Siegfried had no longer even a wish to speak to his mother about it. She would say it was because the mountain was so cold and hard, no good thing, even from Heaven, could stay upon it !

And thus a day or two passed, and the tracts of rosy colour grew fainter, and finally disappeared, as the farmer's son had said was always the case ; and Siegfried never spoke about it again, but sat on the hill-side daily, wondering and dreaming to himself.

But he was interrupted at last. One morning, when the snow looked colder and whiter than ever against the blue sky, and he had been sitting for awhile, with his face hidden by his hands, a voice he did not know called to him, asking what he was doing. And when he lifted up his eyes, a stranger stood between him and Mont Blanc.

A child always answers " Nothing " to such a question, for children never feel thinking to be doing anything.

But the stranger would not be so easily satisfied, and smiling, persisted in his inquiries.

" What are you thinking of then, little boy ? One must be either doing or thinking while one is awake. And I want you to talk to me. I have come from such a long way off, and am so weary."

Here the stranger seated himself by Siegfried's side on the grass.

" First," continued he, " I want you to tell me, if you can, whether I can get to the town of —,

through the pretty valley here at the bottom of this hill? Then, I want you to tell me for whom you have picked this basket of flowers? Then, why you are on this wild hill-side alone? Then, what you think about when you cover up your face with your hands? Now, then, can I get to the town through the valley?"

The voice that asked was so good-natured, and the smile on the stranger's face so kind, that Siegfried was won at once, and looking full at his new friend, and smiling himself, nodded assent to this first question.

"Does your nod always mean yes, little boy?" asked the stranger, amused.

Siegfried nodded again.

"Very good. Now we understand each other. Will you answer my other questions?"

Siegfried gave another nod, and then they both laughed, and the stranger went on.

"For whom have you gathered the flowers?"

"For my mother."

"And why are you here alone?"

"To play."

"What, alone? Why?"

"I have nobody else to play with."

"And what is it you think of when you sit with your face covered up?"

Siegfried's heart melted within him, and, pointing by a sorrowful nod to the giant mountain, he answered, "I think of it."

"Of *it*? What can you find in *it* to think about?"

"I am so sorry for it!" cried little Siegfried, passionately; "so sorry it is so miserable and outcast, and that God will let nothing grow there, while we have all these flowers!"

And once more he tossed the flowers contemptuously out of the basket.

"Ah, little boy," said the stranger, putting his arm kindly round the child, and drawing himself nearer to him. "You must answer another question now. Who put such strange fancies into your head? Who told you this about the poor mountain?"

"They all say so," murmured Siegfried. "The pastor preached about it on Sunday, and mother says so, too, and the farmer's son, and everybody; and I am so sorry, so very sorry!"

The young voice died away, as it were, in regret.

"And why do you care so much about the mountain, little boy?"

Siegfried looked up, puzzled for a moment, but very soon out came the simple, child-like answer, "I look at it so much when I come up here to play."

It was the stranger's turn now to feel his eyes moisten, as he thought of the solitary child sending out his heart into the inanimate creation round him.

Extremely interested, therefore, he made a few more inquiries, and, by degrees, brought out a part, at any rate, of what Siegfried's mother and the pastor between them had told and taught of outcast countries and God-deserted men. All was confusion in the child's account, but the drift of it could easily be discovered.

Without making a single remark, however, the stranger smiled again, and said, quite cheerfully, "I will tell you a secret, little boy. Neither the pastor, nor your mother, nor the farmer's son, were ever up the mountain, I suspect, so they cannot know very very much about it."

"I wanted to go, but they would not let me," interposed Siegfried. "They said I was not able to get up."

"They said right," replied the stranger. "But I, you see, am older and stronger, and could go; and *I have been.*"

Quietly as he purposely spoke, the effect of what he said was, as he expected, very great. Siegfried jumped up; then sat down; then once more started from his seat, and was far more anxious to run down the hill and tell his mother the news, than to remain quietly where he was, and hear what more the stranger had to tell. He allowed himself to be controlled, however, and his friend went on talking as if he had not been interrupted.

"And the place is neither lifeless nor deserted. God sends it the beautiful red snow plant instead of flowers. I have been gathering it for days."

As he spoke, he unfastened from the leathern strap that went across his shoulders a small tin box, and, opening it for a moment, let Siegfried peep at a bright carmine-coloured mass of something within.

The child was speechless at first, overpowered by admiration and delight, but presently exclaimed,

“ Then that was what I saw ! ” adding, gently, “ And it really came down from Heaven, then ? ” He was thinking of what the farmer’s son had said.

“ All good things come from Heaven, that is, from the God of Heaven,” answered the stranger. “ But this is as much a plant as the Alpine rose by your side. It did not drop down from the sky, but grows in the very snow itself, and covers over miles and miles of the hill you thought so desolate. God sends good things everywhere, though not everywhere alike.”

Oh, the joy of such a doctrine ! The simplest child could understand it, and be glad ! All was explained now, too ; the rosy patch and the broad tracts of colour were both accounted for, and Siegfried was as happy as he now believed the mountain to be. And, embracing his new friend, he forthwith began such a blundering account of what he, and his mother, and the farmer’s boy, had thought about the rosy patch, that the stranger could do nothing but laugh, and at last stopped him by exclaiming, “ Then you see you were all wrong ; but never mind. Take me to your mother’s cottage, and we will tell her all about it, too, and I will show it to you both, for even you have not really seen it yet.”

Siegfried’s mother welcomed the friendly stranger whom her son brought to her door with all the heartiness of a Swiss welcome ; and not the less when she found he was an English traveller, on his way to a neighbouring town to visit a well-known officer there,

who had been deprived of a limb in the same action in which Siegfried's father had lost his life.

And as the town was but a few miles off, and the summer evenings so long, the stranger was easily persuaded to rest a few hours in the Swiss cottage, and tell the widow and her son the history of his adventures on Mont Blanc, and of the red snow plant he had brought from it. Not that telling its history only would have been enough ; nor was there anything either beautiful or wonderful-looking in the red, jelly-like mass in the tin box, when looked at only with the naked eye. The stranger had far more in store for them than that.

" I am going to show you," he began, at last, and after busying himself in unpacking that revealer of secrets, a microscope,—“ that God has sent many more gracious things into the world than people commonly think ; because so many more than our natural eyes are able to see. Do you like to know this, little Siegfried ? ” he added, turning purposely to the child.

Siegfried nodded his heartiest nod of assent, and the widow said, with a smile, “ You should have asked that question, Sir, of me. It is I who have not believed, because I did not see. He has had an instinct of the truth all along.”

“ Well, then, good Mother,” replied the stranger, “ you shall see and believe what will, I think, comfort you for life—namely, that God make the very wilderness to burst forth and blossom like a rose ; that there are no outcast ends of the earth, uncared for

by Him ; no desolate corners where His goodness is not shown forth."

As he spoke he finished the last adjustment of the microscope, and touching the red jelly in the tin box with the fine point of a porcupine's quill, he placed the tiny morsel so obtained in a glass, to be looked at, and called to Siegfried to have the first peep.

The widow, struck as she had been with the stranger's words, had her own doubts as to what there could be to be seen, for she had not been able to detect anything on the porcupine's quill, but she said nothing, and very soon Siegfried's shouts of delight announced that *some* thing, at any rate, was there.

And, truly, what there was, was a very pretty sight. Ten or fifteen bright little red balls, and a few colourless ones among them, were lying like gems in the drop or two of water which had been put in to keep them separate.

The child believed at once, but at the first moment the mother could scarcely credit what she saw. That this should be a bit of the shapeless stuff she had looked at in the tin box—it was marvellous indeed.

The stranger now proceeded to explain. He told them that each of the red balls was a plant perfect in itself. That it was a little colourless bag, finer than gold-beater's skin, filled with a red substance, which shone through. That, as soon as it was full grown, the red substance within divided into four, eight, and sometimes sixteen separate red balls, of course of the tiniest size possible, all of which immedi-

ately began to grow very fast, and grew, and grew, and grew, till the little bag in which they lived could hold them no longer, but burst, and dropped them out.

"These," said he, "are the young plants; and when each of *them* is full grown, the same thing happens again. The red substance in each divides into other tiny balls, and, as these grow, they burst out from the parent bag (called a *cell*, properly), and begin life for themselves. And thus comes another generation of the ball-like plants, and so another and another; and all this so quickly, that in a few hours, millions of them have sprung from a few single cells. So now, little Siegfried, you know why, when you looked the second time at the rosy patch, it had spread into those great broad tracts of colour which, in fact, covered over miles of the poor snow with its beauty. It was no wonder, was it?"

No, that was no wonder; but that such things were, of which so many people did not know, was a wonder from which the good widow could not easily recover. Besides, she was thinking of the pastor having made such a mistake.

As for Siegfried, he had not lived long enough to know why he should be so much surprised about the red snow plant; was it a bit more really strange than the growth of the Alpine rose, which astonished nobody? So his chief feeling was extreme delight at there being something on the mountain to make amends for its want of flowers.

"And now," said the stranger "is there anything more you would like to ask?"

The mother was about to speak at once, but hesitated and drew back. She knew so little ; she feared to seem so ignorant and foolish.

Reassured, however, she begged to be told how the marvellous plant could live amidst nothing but snow ; could come up, and bring forth a thousand fold, with nothing to nourish and support it ?

The stranger repeated the word "*nothing*" with a smile.

" Nothing, because we see nothing ? "

" Ah, see what a bad habit is ! " cried the mother. " I had forgotten already. Then you think there may be things I do not know of, in what we call the cold, barren snow ? "

" Ay, ay," was the answer ; " germs of life, hidden and buried, perhaps, for years ; seeds scattered no one can tell how or when ; and salts and chemical properties, needing only some accident of a sunbeam, or dew, or state of the very air to make all work together, and the frozen surface to become moist, and the red snow plant to spring up by millions."

Here he paused, and seeing little Siegfried looking wistfully at him, as if trying to understand, he took him on his knee caressingly, and said, " That microscope is a very curious thing, is it not ? "

The child nodded his " yes " as heartily as ever, and then laid his head, contentedly, on his friend's shoulder, while he went on talking.

" Yes ; it is very curious, for it shows us quantities of things we could not see without it ; but the best

lesson it teaches is, how much more there may be of which, even with its help, we can see and know nothing ; for, although there is a limit to our power of seeing God's works, no naturalist dares to think he has reached the limits of the works themselves. In this life we cannot hope to know a hundredth part of the creations which surround us. You can believe this now, good Mother ? ”

“ With all my heart,” was her answer.

“ And, further,” he added, “ you can judge now for yourself, that even of the things we do what we call see with the naked eye, there are a great many of which we can never know anything like the real truth, without such aid as this (pointing to the microscope). What was the red snow plant to you at first ? A piece of shapeless jelly. What did it become to your more enlightened eye ? A living organism, unmistakably from Almighty hands, endowed with a system of life, if not of life, enjoyment, peculiarly its own. This is something to have discovered, certainly, but is it all ? Ah ! as I tell it, I feel how imperfect the account is—how much remains behind. All we have done is but to have made a step or two out of complete ignorance.

‘ The rest remaineth unrevealed.’

Yet a glory comes into our hearts from the thought of the worlds beyond reach of our present senses, like the reflection from lightning below our own horizon, and both faith and hope ought to be strengthened.”

The widow did not speak.

“ I have one word more to say,” continued the stranger guest, “ if you will allow me to say it, and can forgive the old traveller for preaching as well as teaching. I have taught you something of God’s doings in the natural world, which has given you comfort and hope. What, then, you believe of His works, believe also of His mercies. If you cannot find a limit to the one, suspect and hope that the other, too, may be infinite—far beyond our comprehension. Will you try and take this last lesson to heart ? ”

The poor mother’s eyes filled with tears. She had passed tremblingly through life, and sadly needed the good counsel.

After a short pause, her counsellor went on, firmly, but very kindly :

“ You have seen how weak and short-sighted the natural eye is ; can you for a moment suppose that the spiritual eye is more far-seeing and better able to acquaint you with God’s purposes and doings ? Are His works to be infinite, and His mercies bounded so that a man can point to the limit, and say, Here God’s mercy ceases ; here there is no hope—but only *everlasting lifelessness and despair* ? Oh, good Mother, to whom is entrusted the rearing of a very tender plant, take heed what you teach, and foster in it, above all other virtues, the charity which ‘ hopeth all things,’ and then can both believe and endure.”

The lesson was not spoken in vain even then, and it was never forgotten. And Siegfried grew on, and

the stranger revisited the cottage many times, and by-and-by aided in the education of the child whose acquaintance he had made in so singular a manner. And, after many years the young man, Siegfried, became a teacher himself—a pastor—though not in his own country.

But never, through a long life, did he forget his early hopes, and fears, and fancies, about the desolate mountain, nor the lesson he learnt from the stranger traveller. And into whatever scenes of darkness and ignorance he forced his way ; whatever he met with of sin and sorrow ; however often baffled, thrown back, and disappointed, he never despaired ; for he used to recall the past, and take comfort to himself by thinking, " It may be God's will yet, that the red snow plant may one day burst into life on the cold hill-side."



A LESSON OF FAITH

“ If a man die, shall he live *again* ? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.”—
JOB xiv. 14.

“ LET me hire you as a nurse for my poor children,” said a Butterfly to a quiet Caterpillar, who was strolling along a cabbage-leaf in her odd lumbering way. “ See these little eggs,” continued the Butterfly ; “ I don’t know how long it will be before they come to life, and I feel very sick and poorly, and if I should die, who will take care of my baby butterflies when I am gone ? Will *you*, kind, mild, green Caterpillar ? But you must mind what you give them to eat, Caterpillar !—they cannot, of course, live on *your* rough food. You must give them early dew, and honey from the flowers ; and you must let them fly about only a little way at first ; for, of course, one can’t expect them to use their wings properly all at once. Dear me ! it is a sad pity you cannot fly yourself. But I have no time to look for another nurse now, so you will do your best, I hope. Dear ! dear ! I cannot think what made me come and lay my eggs on a cabbage-leaf ! What a place for young butterflies to be born upon ! Still you will be kind, will you not, to the poor little ones ? Here, take this gold-dust from my wings as a reward. Oh, how dizzy I am ! Caterpillar ! you will remember about the food——”

And with these words the Butterfly drooped her wings and died ; and the green Caterpillar, who had not had the opportunity of even saying Yes or No to the request, was left standing alone by the side of the Butterfly's eggs.

"A pretty nurse she has chosen, indeed, poor lady!" exclaimed she, "and a pretty business I have in hand! Why, her senses must have left her, or she never would have asked a poor crawling creature like me to bring up her dainty little ones! Much they'll mind me, truly, when they feel the gay wings on their backs, and can fly away out of my sight whenever they choose! Ah! how silly some people are, in spite of their painted clothes and the gold-dust on their wings!"

However, the poor Butterfly was dead, and there lay the eggs on the cabbage-leaf; and the green Caterpillar had a kind heart, so she resolved to do her best. But she got no sleep that night, she was so very anxious. She made her back quite ache with walking all night long round her young charges, for fear any harm should happen to them; and in the morning says she to herself—

"Two heads are better than one. I will consult some wise animal upon the matter, and get advice. How should a poor crawling creature like me know what to do without asking my betters?"

But still there was a difficulty—whom should the Caterpillar consult? There was the shaggy Dog who sometimes came into the garden. But he was so rough!—he would most likely whisk all the eggs off

the cabbage-leaf with one brush of his tail, if she called him near to talk to her, and then she should never forgive herself. There was the Tom Cat, to be sure, who would sometimes sit at the foot of the apple-tree, basking himself and warming his fur in the sunshine ; but he was so selfish and indifferent ! —there was no hope of his giving himself the trouble to think about butterflies' eggs. " I wonder which is the wisest of all the animals I know," sighed the Caterpillar, in great distress ; and then she thought, and thought, till at last she thought of the Lark ; and she fancied that because he went up so high, and nobody knew where he went to, he must be very clever, and know a great deal ; for to go up very high (which *she* could never do) was the Caterpillar's idea of perfect glory.

Now, in the neighbouring corn-field there lived a Lark, and the Caterpillar sent a message to him, to beg him to come and talk to her ; and when he came she told him all her difficulties, and asked him what she was to do, to feed and rear the little creatures so different from herself.

" Perhaps you will be able to inquire and hear something about it next time you go up high," observed the Caterpillar timidly.

The Lark said, " Perhaps he should " ; but he did not satisfy her curiosity any further. Soon afterwards, however, he went singing upwards into the bright, blue sky. By degrees his voice died away in the distance, till the green Caterpillar could not hear a sound. It is nothing to say she could not see him ;

for, poor thing ! she never could see far at any time, and had a difficulty in looking upwards at all, even when she reared herself up most carefully, which she did now ; but it was of no use, so she dropped upon her legs again, and resumed her walk round the Butterfly's eggs, nibbling a bit of the cabbage-leaf now and then as she moved along.

“ What a time the Lark has been gone ! ” she cried, at last. “ I wonder where he is just now ! I would give all my legs to know ! He must have flown up higher than usual this time, I do think ! How I should like to know where it is that he goes to, and what he hears in that curious blue sky ! He always sings in going up and coming down, but he never lets any secret out. He is very, very close ! ”

And the green Caterpillar took another turn round the Butterfly's eggs.

At last the Lark's voice began to be heard again. The Caterpillar almost jumped for joy, and it was not long before she saw her friend descend with hushed note to the cabbage bed.

“ News, news, glorious news, friend Caterpillar ! ” sang the Lark ; “ but the worst of it is, you won't believe me ! ”

“ I believe everything I am told,” observed the Caterpillar hastily.

“ Well, then, first of all, I will tell you what these little creatures are to eat ”—and the Lark nodded his beak towards the eggs. “ What do you think it is to be ? Guess ! ”

"Dew, and the honey out of flowers, I am afraid," sighed the Caterpillar.

"No such thing, old lady ! Something simpler than that. Something that *you* can get at quite easily."

"I can get at nothing quite easily but cabbage-leaves," murmured the Caterpillar, in distress.

"Excellent ! my good friend," cried the Lark exultingly ; "you have found it out. You are to feed them with cabbage-leaves."

"*Never !*" said the Caterpillar indignantly. "It was their dying mother's last request that I should do no such thing."

"Their dying mother knew nothing about the matter," persisted the Lark ; "but why do you ask me, and then disbelieve what I say ? You have neither faith nor trust."

"Oh, I believe everything I am told," said the Caterpillar.

"Nay, but you do not," replied the Lark ; "you won't believe me even about the food, and yet that is but a beginning of what I have to tell you. Why, Caterpillar, what do you think those little eggs will turn out to be ?"

"Butterflies, to be sure," said the Caterpillar.

"*Caterpillars !*" sang the Lark ; "and you'll find it out in time" ; and the Lark flew away, for he did not want to stay and contest the point with his friend.

"I thought the Lark had been wise and kind," observed the mild green Caterpillar, once more beginning to walk round the eggs, "but I find that he is foolish and saucy instead. Perhaps he went

up *too* high this time. Ah, it's a pity when people who soar so high are silly and rude nevertheless ! Dear ! I still wonder whom he sees, and what he does up yonder."

"I would tell you, if you would believe me," sang the Lark, descending once more.

"I believe everything I am told," reiterated the Caterpillar, with as grave a face as if it were a fact.

"Then I'll tell you something else," cried the Lark ; "for the best of my news remains behind. *You will one day be a Butterfly yourself.*"

"Wretched bird !" exclaimed the Caterpillar, "you jest with my inferiority—now you are cruel as well as foolish. Go away ! I will ask your advice no more."

"I told you you would not believe me," cried the Lark, nettled in his turn.

"I believe everything that I am told," persisted the Caterpillar ; "that is"—and she hesitated,—
"everything that it is *reasonable* to believe. But to tell me that butterflies' eggs are caterpillars, and that caterpillars leave off crawling and get wings, and become butterflies !——Lark ! you are too wise to believe such nonsense yourself, for you know it is impossible."

"I know no such thing," said the Lark, warmly. "Whether I hover over the corn-fields of earth, or go up into the depths of the sky, I see so many wonderful things, I know no reason why there should not be more. Oh, Caterpillar ! it is because you crawl, because you never get beyond your cabbage-leaf, that you call *any* thing *impossible*."

"Nonsense!" shouted the Caterpillar, "I know what's possible, and what's not possible, according to my experience and capacity, as well as you do. Look at my long green body and these endless legs, and then talk to me about having wings and a painted feathery coat! Fool!——"

"And fool you! you would-be-wise Caterpillar!" cried the indignant Lark. "Fool, to attempt to reason about what you cannot understand! Do you not hear how my song swells with rejoicing as I soar upwards to the mysterious wonder-world above? Oh, Caterpillar! what comes to you from thence, receive as *I* do upon trust."

"That is what you call——"

"*Faith*," interrupted the Lark.

"How am I to learn Faith?" asked the Caterpillar—

At that moment she felt something at her side. She looked round—eight or ten little green caterpillars were moving about, and had already made a show of a hole in the cabbage-leaf. They had broken from the Butterfly's eggs!

Shame and amazement filled our green friend's heart, but joy soon followed; for, as the first wonder was possible, the second might be so too. "Teach me your lesson, Lark!" she would say; and the Lark sang to her of the wonders of the earth below, and of the heaven above. And the Caterpillar talked all the rest of her life to her relations of the time when she should be a Butterfly.

But none of them believed her. She nevertheless

had learnt the Lark's lesson of faith, and when she was going into her chrysalis grave, she said—" I shall be a Butterfly some day ! "

But her relations thought her head was wandering, and they said, " Poor thing ! "

And when she was a Butterfly, and was going to die again, she said—

" I have known many wonders—I have faith—I can trust even now for what shall come next ! "



PURRING WHEN YOU'RE PLEASED

" Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."
—MATT. xii. 34.

THEY had been licked over hundreds of times by the same mother, had been brought up on the same food, lived in the same house, learnt the same lessons, heard the same advice, and yet how different they were ! Never were there two kittens more thoroughly unlike than those two ! The one, with an open, loving heart, which never could contain itself in its joy, purred it out at once to all the world ; the other, who scarcely ever purred at all, and that never above its breath, let him be as happy or as fond as he would.

It was partly his mother's fault, perhaps, for she always set her children the example of reserve ; rarely purring herself, and then only in a low tone. But, poor thing, there were excuses to be made for her ; she had had so many troubles. Cats generally have. Their kittens are taken away from them so often, and they get so hissed about the house when people are busy, and the children pull them about so heedlessly, and make the dogs run after them—which is so irritating—that really the wonder is they ever purr at all !

Nevertheless her not feeling inclined to purr much

herself was no good reason for her thinking it silly or wrong in other people to purr when they were pleased ; but she did, and she and her purring daughter were always having small tiffs on the subject.

Every morning, for instance, when the nice curly-headed little boy brought the kittens a saucer of milk from his breakfast, there was sure to be a disturbance over the purring question, for, even before the saucer had reached the floor, Puss Missy was sure to be there, tail and head erect and eager, singing her loudest and best, her whole throat vibrating visibly ; while Puss Master, on the contrary, took his food, but said very little about it, or, if ever tempted to express his natural delight, did it in so low a tone that nobody could hear without putting their ears close down to him to listen.

Now this was what the mother cat called keeping up one's dignity and self-respect, so it can easily be imagined how angry she used to get with the other child. " Wretched little creature ! " she would say to poor Puss Missy, who, even after the meal was over, would lie purring with pleasure in front of the fire ; " what in the world are you making all that noise and fuss about ? Why are you to be always letting yourself down by thanking people for what they do for you, as if you did not deserve it, and had not a right to expect it ? Isn't it quite right of them to feed you and keep you warm ? What a shame it would be if they left you without food or fire ! I am ashamed to see you make yourself so cheap, by showing gratitude for every trifle. For goodness' sake

have a little proper pride, and leave off such fawning ways ! Look at your brother, and see how differently *he* behaves !—takes everything as a matter of course, and has the sense to keep his feelings to himself ; and people are sure to respect him all the more. It keeps up one's friends' interest when they are not too sure that one is pleased. But you, with your everlasting acknowledgments, will be seen through, and despised very soon. Have a little more esteem for your own character, I do beg ! What is to become of self-respect if people are to purr whenever they are pleased ? ”

Puss Missy had not the least notion what would become of it in such a case, but she supposed something dreadful ; so she felt quite horrified at herself for having done anything to bring such a misfortune about, and made a thousand resolutions to keep up her dignity, save self-respect from the terrible unknown fate in store, and purr no more.

But it was all in vain. As soon as ever anything happened to make her feel happy and comfortable, throb went the little throat, as naturally as flowers come out in spring, and there she was in a fresh scrape again ! And the temptations were endless. The little boy's cousin, pale, and quiet, and silent as she was, would often take Puss Missy on her knee, and nurse her for half an hour at a time, stroking her so gently and kindly—how could any one help purring ?

Or the boy would tie a string, with a cork at the end of it, to the drawer-handle of a table, so that the kittens could paw it, and pat it, and spring at it, as they pleased—how was it possible not to give vent to

one's delight in the intervals of such a game, when the thing was swinging from side to side before their very eyes, inviting the next bound ?

And when there was nothing else to be pleased about, there were always their own tails to run after, and the fun was surely irresistible, and well deserved a song.

Yet the brother very seldom committed himself in that way—that was the great puzzle, and Puss Missy grew more perplexed as time went on. Nay, once, when they were alone together, and her spirits had quite got the better of her judgment, she boldly asked him, in as many words, “ Why do you not purr when you are pleased ? ” as if it was quite the natural and proper thing to do. Whereat he seemed quite taken by surprise, but answered at last : “ It's so weak-minded, mother says ; I should be ashamed. Besides,” added he, after a short pause, “ to tell you the truth—but don't say anything about it—when I begin, there's something that chokes a little in my throat. Mind you don't tell—it would let me down so in mother's eyes. She likes one to keep up one's dignity, you know.”

Had Mother Puss overheard these words, she might have been a little startled by such a result of her teaching ; but, as it was, she remained in happy ignorance that her son was influenced by anything but her advice.

. . . Yet, strange to say, she had that choking in the throat, sometimes herself ! . . .

But, at last, a change came in their lives. One day their friend, the curly-headed boy, came bounding into the kitchen where Puss and her kittens were

asleep, in raptures of delight, followed by the pale, quiet, silent cousin, as quiet and silent as ever. The boy rushed to the kittens at once, took up both together in his hands, laid one over the other for fun, and then said to the girl, "Cousin, now they're going to give us the kittens for our very own, just tell me which you like best, really? I'm so afraid you won't choose for yourself when they ask you, and then, if I have to choose instead, I shan't know which you would rather have! And I want you to have the one you like most—so do tell me beforehand!"

"Oh, I like them both!" answered the girl, in the same unmoved, indifferent tone, in which she generally spoke.

"So do I," replied her cousin; "but I know which I like best for all that; and so must you, only you won't say. I wonder whether you like to have the kittens at all?" added he, looking at the pale child a little doubtfully; then whispering, as he put them both to her face to be kissed, "Cousin, dear, I wish I could see when you were pleased by your face! See! give a smile when the one you like best goes by. Do—won't you—this once—just for once?" . . .

It was in vain! he passed the kittens before her in succession, that she might see the markings of their fur, but she still only said she liked both, and, of course, was glad to have a kitten, and so on; till, at last, he was disheartened, and asked no more.

It is a great distress to some people when their friends will *not* purr when they are pleased; and as the children went back together to the drawing-room,

the little boy was the sadder of the two, though he could not have explained why.

And then, just what he expected happened,—the choice between the two kittens was offered first to the girl ; but, instead of accepting it as a favour, and saying “ Thank you ” for it, and being pleased, as she ought to have been, she would say nothing but that she liked both, and it could not matter which she had ; nay, to look at her as she spoke, nobody would have thought she cared for having either at all !

How was it that she did not observe how sorrowfully her aunt was gazing at her as she spoke ; aye, and with a sorrow far beyond anything the kittens could occasion ?

But she did not ; and presently her aunt said, “ Well, then, as she did not care, the boy should choose.” On which the poor boy coloured with vexation ; but when he had sought his cousin’s eyes again and again in vain for some token of her feelings, he laid sudden hold on Puss Missy, and cuddled her against his cheek, exclaiming :

“ Then I will have this one ! I like her much the best, Mother, because she purrs when she is pleased ! ”

And then the little girl took up Puss Master, and kissed him very kindly, but went away without saying another word.

And so a week passed ; and though the children nursed their kittens, they never discussed the question of which was liked best again, for a shyness had sprung up about it ever since the day the choice had been made.



A SENSE OF COMFORTING TENDERNES CREEPING INTO THE LONG-
LONELY HEART.

But at the end of the week, one sunshiny morning, when the boy was riding his father's pony, and only the little girl was in the house, her aunt, coming suddenly into the school-room, discovered her kneeling by the sofa, weeping a silent rain of tears over the fur-coat of Puss Missy, who was purring loudly all the time ; while her own kitten, Puss Master, was lying asleep unnoticed by the fire.

* * * * *

Now, the pale, silent little girl had been an orphan nearly two years—father and mother having died within a few weeks of each other ; and she had been ever since, till quite lately, under the care of a guardian, who, though married, had no children, and was more strict and well-intentioned than kind and comprehending ; so that, between sorrow at first and fear afterwards, joined to a timid, shrinking nature, she had, without knowing anything about it, shut herself up in a sort of defensive armour of self-restraint, which, till now, neither aunt, nor uncle, nor even loving cousin, had been able to break through.

But they had gently bided their time, and the time had come at last, and Puss Missy pointed the moral ; for, with her aunt's arms folded round her, and a sense of her comforting tenderness creeping into the long-lonely heart, she owned that she had fretted all the week in secret because—actually because—*it was so miserable to nurse a kitten who would not purr when he was pleased !*

* * * * *

Anybody may guess how nice it was, ten minutes afterwards, to see the little girl, with the roused colour of warm feeling on her cheeks, smiling through her tears at the thought of how like the unpurring kitten she had been herself ! Anybody may guess, too, with what riotous joy the loving boy-cousin insisted on her changing kittens at once, and having Puss Missy for her very own. And how, on the other hand, he set to work himself, with a resolute heart, to make Puss Master so fond of him that purr he must, whether he would or no ; and how that, now and then, by dint of delicate attentions, such as choice morsels of food and judicious rubbing under the ears, he worked the creature up to such a pitch of complacency, that the vibrations of his throat became, at any rate, visible to sight, and perceptible to touch.

Truly, they were a very happy party ; for after Puss Master took Puss Missy for friend, confidante, and adviser, he grew so loving and fond, that he could not help showing his feelings in a thousand pretty, pleasant ways ; and the mother-cat herself relaxed by degrees ; perhaps, because she found her kittens were not taken away—partly, perhaps, because Puss Missy's open-heartedness stole into her heart at last with a sense of comfort—who knows ? Certainly she left off scolding and lecturing, and would not only watch their gambols, but join in them at times herself. And if neither she nor her son ever purred quite so much, or so loudly as their neighbours, the reason, no doubt, was only that tiresome choking in the throat !

Why, the pale little girl herself complained of having felt something very like it, during the sad two years before her kind aunt made her happy again ! It always used to come on when she wanted to say what she felt.

And, perhaps, there is always something that chokes in the throat when people do not purr when they are pleased.

Let us hope so !



COBWEBS

"I cannot make this matter plain,
But I would shoot, howe'er in vain,
A random arrow from the brain."—TENNYSON.

TWINETTE the Spider was young, hungry, and industrious. "Weave yourself a web, my dear," said her mother, "as you know how without teaching, and catch flies for yourself; only don't weave near me in the corner here. I am old, and stay in the corners; but you are young, and needn't. Besides, you would be in my way. Scramble along the rafters to a little distance off, and spin. But mind! just see there's nothing there—below you, I mean—before you begin. You won't catch anything to eat, if there isn't empty space about you for the flies to fly in."

Twinette was dutiful, and obeyed. She scrambled along the woodwork of the groined roof of the church—for it was there her mother lived—till she had gone what she thought might fairly be called a little distance off, and then she stopped to look round, which, considering she had eight eyes to do it with, was not difficult. But she was not so sure of what there might be below.

"I wonder whether mother would say there was nothing here—below me, I mean,—but empty space for flies to fly in?" said she. But she might have stood wondering there for ever. So she went back to her mother, and asked what she thought.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said her mother, "how can I think about what I don't see? There usen't to be anything there in my young days, I'm sure. But everybody must find out things for themselves. Let yourself down by the family rope, as you know how, without teaching, and see for yourself if there's anything there or not."

Twinette was a very intelligent young spider quite worthy of the age she was born in; so she thanked her mother for her advice, and was just starting afresh, when another thought struck her. "How shall I know if there's anything there when I get there?" asked she.

"Dear me, if there's anything there, how can you help seeing it?" cried the mother, rather teased by her daughter's inquiring spirit, "you with at least eight eyes in your head!"

"Thank you. Now I quite understand," said Twinette; and scuttling back to the end of the rafter, she began to prepare the family rope.

It was the most exquisite thing in the world—so fine, you could scarcely see it; so elastic, it could be blown about without breaking; such a perfect grey that it looked white against black things, and black against white; so manageable that Twinette could both make it, and slide down by it at once; and when she wished to get back, could slip up by it, and roll it up at the same time!

It was a wonderful rope for anybody to make without teaching. But Twinette was not conceited. Rope-making came as natural to her as eating and

fighting do to intelligent little boys, so she thought no more about it than we do of chewing our food.

How she did it is another question, and one not easily answered, however intelligent we may be. Thus much may be hinted :—Out of four little spinning machines near the tail came four little threads, and the rope was a four-twist of these. But as each separate thread was itself a many-twist of a great many others, still finer, I do not pretend to tell the number of strands (as rope-threads are called) in Twinette's family rope. Enough, that as she made it now, it has been made from generation to generation, and there seems to be no immediate prospect of a change.

The plan was for the spinner to glue the ends to the rafter, and then start off. Then, out came the threads from the spinning machines, and twist went the rope ; and the further the spinner travelled, the longer the rope became.

And Twinette made ready accordingly, and turning on her back, let herself fairly off.

The glued ends held fast, the four strands twined closely together, and down went the family rope, with Twinette at the end, guiding it. Down into the middle of the chancel, where there were carved oaken screens on three sides, and carved oaken seats below with carved oaken figures at each end of each.

Twinette was about halfway down to the stone-flagged floor, when she shut up the spinning machines, and stopped to rest and look round. Then, balancing herself at the end of her rope, with her legs crumpled up round her, she made her remarks.

"This is charming!" cried she. "One had need to travel and see the world. And all's so nice in the middle here. Nice empty space for the flies to fly about in; and a very pleasant time they must have of it! Dear me, how hungry I feel—I must go back and weave at once."

But just as she was preparing to roll up the rope and be off, a ray of sunshine, streaming through one of the chancel windows, struck in a direct line upon her suspended body, quite startling her with the dazzle of its brightness. Everything seemed in a blaze all around her, and she turned round and round in terror.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" cried she, for she didn't know what to say, and still couldn't help calling out. Then, making a great effort, she gave one hearty spring, and, blinded though she was, shot up to the groined roof, as fast as spider could go, rolling the rope into a ball as she went. After which she stopped to complain.

But it is dull work complaining to oneself, so she soon ran back to her mother in the corner.

"Back again so soon, my dear?" asked the old lady, not over-pleased at the fresh disturbance.

"Back again at all is the wonder," whimpered Twinette. "There's something down there, after all, beside empty space."

"Why, what did you see?" asked her mother.

"Nothing; that was just it," answered Twinette. "I could see nothing for dazzle and blaze; but I did see dazzle and blaze."

“ Young people of the present day are very troublesome with their observations,” remarked the mother ; “ however, if one rule will not do, here is another. Did dazzle and blaze shove you out of your place, my dear ? ”

Twinette said, “ Certainly not—she had come away of herself.”

“ Then how could they be anything ? ” asked her mother. “ Two things could not be in one place at the same time. Let Twinette try to get into her place, while she was there herself, and see if she could.”

Twinette did not try, because she knew she couldn't, but she sat very silent, wondering what dazzle and blaze could be, if they were nothing at all ! a puzzle which might have lasted her for ever. Fortunately her mother interrupted her, by advising her to go and get something to do. She really couldn't afford to feed her out of *her* web any longer, she said.

“ If dazzle and blaze kill me, you'll be sorry, mother,” said Twinette, in a pet.

“ Nonsense, about dazzle and blaze,” cried the old Spider, now thoroughly roused. “ I dare say they're only a little more light than usual. There's more or less light up here in the corners, even, at times. You talk nonsense, my dear.”

So Twinette scuttled off in silence ; for she dared not ask what light was, though she wanted to know.

But she felt too cross to begin to spin. She preferred a search after truth to her dinner, which showed she was no commonplace spider. So she resolved to go down below in another place and see if she could

find a really empty space, and accordingly prepared the family rope.

When she came down, it was about half a foot further east in the chancel, and a very prosperous journey she made. "Come! all's safe so far," said she, her good humour returning. "I do believe I've found nothing at last. How jolly it is!" As she spoke, she hung dangling at the end of her rope, back downwards, her legs tucked up round her as before, in perfect enjoyment, when, suddenly, the south door of the church was thrown open, and a strong gust set in. It was a windy evening, and the draught that poured into the chancel blew the family rope, with Twinette at the end of it, backwards and forwards through the air, till she turned quite giddy.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried she, puffing. "What shall I do! How could they say there was nothing here—oh dear!—but empty space for flies—oh dear!—to fly in?" But at last, in despair, she made an effort of resistance, and, in the very teeth of the wind, succeeded in coiling up the family rope, and so got back to the rafters.

It was a piece of rare good fortune for her that a lazy, half-alive fly happened to be creeping along it just at the moment. As she landed from her air-dive, she pounced on the stroller, killed him, and sucked his juices before he knew where he was, as people say. Then, throwing down his carcass, she scrambled back to her mother, and told her what she thought, though not in plain words. For what she thought was that the old lady didn't know what

she was saying, when she talked about empty space with nothing in it.

"Dazzle and blaze were nothing," cried she at last, "though they blinded me because they and I were in one place together, which couldn't be if they'd been anything; and now this is nothing, though it blows me out of my place twenty times in a minute, because I can't see it. What's the use of rules one can't go by, mother? I don't believe you know a quarter of what's down below there."

The old spider's head turned as giddy with Twinette's arguments as Twinette's had done while swinging in the wind.

"I don't see what it can matter what's there," whimpered she, "if there's room for flies to fly about in. I wish you'd go back and spin."

"That's another part of the question," remarked Twinette, in answer to the first half of her mother's sentence. In answer to the second she scuttled back to the rafter, intending to be obedient and spin. But she dawdled and thought, and thought and dawdled, till the day was nearly over.

"I will take one more turn down below," said she to herself at last, "and look round me again."

And so she did, but went further down than before, then stopped to rest as usual. Presently, as she hung dangling in the air by her line, she grew venturesome. "I will sift the matter to the bottom," thought she. "I will see how far empty space goes." So saying she re-opened her spinning-machines and started afresh.

It was a wonderful rope, certainly, or it would not have gone on to such a length without breaking. In a few seconds Twinette was on the cold stone pavement. But she didn't like the feel of it at all, so took to running as fast as she could go, and luckily met with a step of woodwork on one side. Up this she hurried at once, and crept into a corner close by, where she stopped to take breath. "One doesn't know what to expect in such queer outlandish places," observed she; "when I've rested I'll go back, but I must wait till I can see a little better."

Seeing a little better was out of the question, however, for night was coming on, and when, weary of waiting, she stepped out of her hiding-place to look round, the whole church was in darkness.

Now it is one thing to be snug in bed when it is dark, and another to be a long way from home and have lost your way, and not know what may happen to you next minute. Twinette had often been in the dark corner with her mother, and thought nothing of it. Now she shook all over with fright, and wondered what dreadful thing darkness could be.

Then she thought of her mother's rules, and felt quite angry.

"I can't see anything, and I don't feel anything," murmured she, "and yet here's something that frightens me out of my wits."

At last her very fright made her bold. She felt about for the family rope; it was there safe and sound, and she made a spring. Roll went the rope, and up went its owner; higher, higher, higher,

through the dark night air ; seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing but the desperate fear within. By the time she touched the rafter, she was half exhausted ; and as soon as she was safely landed upon it, she fell asleep.

It must have been late next morning when she woke, for the sound of organ music was pealing through the church, and the air vibrations swept pleasantly over her frame, rising and falling like gusts of night, swelling and sinking like waves of the sea, gathering and dispersing like vapours of the sky.

She went down by the family rope to observe, but nothing was to be seen to account for her sensations. Fresh ones, however, stole round her, as she hung suspended, for it was a harvest-festival, and large white lilies were grouped with evergreens round the slender pillars of the screens, and filled the air with their powerful odour. Still, nothing disturbed her from her place. Sunshine streamed in through the windows—she even felt it warm on her body—but it interfered with nothing else ; and, meanwhile, in such sort as spiders hear, she heard music and prayer :—whether as music and prayer come to us, or as deaf men enjoy sound by touch, let those say who can ! A door opened, and a breeze caught her rope ; but still she held fast. So music and prayer and sunshine and breeze and scent were all there together ; and Twinette was among them, and saw flies flying about overhead.

This was enough ; she went back to the rafter, chose a home, and began to spin. Before evening,

her web was completed, and her first prey caught and feasted on. Then she cleared the remains out of her chamber, and sat down in state to think ; for Twinette was now a philosopher. It came to her while she was spinning her web. As she crossed and twisted the threads, her ideas grew clearer and clearer, or she fancied so, which did almost as well. Each line she fastened brought its own reflection ; and this was the way they went on :—

“ Empty space is an old wife’s tale ”—she fixed that very tight. “ Sight and touch are very imperfect guides ”—this crossed the other at an angle. “ Two or three things can easily be in one place at the very same time ”—this seemed very loose till she tightened it by a second. “ Sunshine and wind and scent and sound don’t drive each other out of their places ”—that held firm. “ When one has sensations there is something to cause them, whether one sees it, or feels it, or finds it out, or not ”—this was a wonderful thread, it went right round the web and was fastened down in several places. “ Light and darkness; and sunshine and wind, and sound and sensation, and fright and pleasure, don’t keep away flies ”—the little interlacing threads looked quite pretty as she placed them. “ How many things I know of that I don’t know much about ”—the web got thicker every minute. “ And perhaps there may be ever so many more beyond—ever so many more—ever so many more—beyond.” Those were her very last words. She kept repeating them till she finished her web ; and when she sat up in state, after

supper, to think, she began to repeat them again ; for she could think of nothing better or wiser to say. But this was no wonder, for all her thoughts put together made nothing but a cobweb, after all !

And when the Turk's-head broom swept it, with others, from the roof, Twinette was no longer into a little chamber below. She had died and bequeathed her cobweb-wisdom to another generation. But, as it was only cobweb-wisdom, spiders remain spiders still, and still weave their webs in the roofs of churches without fathoming the mystery of unseen presences below.



THE DELIVERER

“Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar.”

—CHRISTMAS HYMN.

FOR years there had been abroad over the earth, a whisper that a Deliverer was about to arise: a Deliverer who had been promised from the earliest ages of the world. Some mighty man or king, some sage or conqueror, who would bring back lost justice, goodness, and happiness to the suffering race of men, and begin a reign of everlasting peace.

And the hearts of all whom the whisper reached, caught fire at the thought; for who so dull as not to know his own wretchedness, or not see that things around him might be better than they were? Ah! men knew it but too well. Death, sickness, the necessity of labour, labour bestowed in vain, wronged affections, the triumph of might over right, wars and tumults, household divisions, and the thousand other miseries of life, had from year to year in every age unfolded to each man in succession, as he awoke to reason, the strange, sad fact that some prevailing disorder existed in the world in his own particular day; while at the same time a strong instinct in his soul told him, that it had not always been so,—would not be so for ever.

So the whisper of a Deliverer stole into all hearts

with a promise of better things in store ; but, obscure and indefinite, it was interpreted by many minds in as many different ways, according to the bent of different wishes and feelings. Only in one thing all agreed, namely, that at the advent of this Mighty One, sorrow and evil should flee away, and joy and peace be spread over the earth as the waters cover the sea.

A Deliverer !—what should he deliver them from, if not from the death so abhorrent to every instinct of their being ; from the grinding sicknesses which made life a burden even to the young ; from the toil that kept the strong man back from ease and enjoyment ; from the disappointments which racked the tenderest and best emotions of their hearts ; from the chains of unjust oppression ; from the strife of parties and of tongues ; from the weakness of their own souls, which left them a prey to evil imaginations from within and a thousand temptations from without ?

Truly such life was but a weariness at the best : and “ Oh for a Deliverer ! ” was the cry that went up from each man’s heart as his own particular burden bore him down. Oh that the everlasting doors were lifted up, that the King of Glory might come in, and touch the earth with some magic sceptre, restoring all things to order and joy !

But the name of the Mighty One was to be called “ Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” And the government was to be upon his shoulders, although he was to be a son, and born a child. Where, then, but in palaces could he be expected, or looked for ;

where but in palaces brought forth and nurtured ? Surely, kings must be his nursing fathers and their queens his nursing mothers. Oh happy parents of a happy child !—who great enough, who high enough to be so favoured ? Yet the child of these great ones was to be greater and mightier than all, to rule and triumph over all !—A King of kings, a Lord of lords ! Well might the longing eyes of hope be fixed on palaces and regal halls ! Well might the murmured question arise, “ Can this be He ? ” when the cry of a new-born prince was heard within their walls ! What wonder if Sibyl and Poet sang, by anticipation, of His fame !

But ever as the children of these great ones grew up to manhood, they merged by the common lot of suffering and sin into common men, and hope was darkened ; yet though darkened not extinguished—and the Deliverer was still looked for as before.

Some, however, there were, who found in the titles, “ Wonderful, Counsellor,” another meaning and another aim. Kingly the Deliverer might be by influence and character, but not necessarily in his human birth. The kingship of man’s noblest faculty—Reason—might be at hand, to overthrow all kingships of mere blood ; the triumph of mind over material things, the kingship of intellect over brute passion and force.

The poor wise man who saved the city, but had neither thanks nor honour for his pains, was a type of a state of things now at last about to pass away. And the midnight oil had not been wasted, nor the

brain racked in vain, if this were so indeed ; if the day and hour were at hand when He should be exalted as universal Counsellor, whom wisdom had made fit to rule ; and He be called Wonderful who was great by the secrets of his mind.

And as sages and philosophers meditated on these things, there glowed in their bosoms aspirations which bordered on devotion. And they stretched out supplicating hands to the Unseen Ruler of all, asking that the Wonderful, the Counsellor, might bring them light and truth indeed, and conquer with those arms alone the ignorance and errors of the world.

Oh for the rising of that day, when the real majesty and power of the human mind should be revealed to the ignorant multitude in all its magnificence ! Here is the only greatness worth the name ! Here the only power fit for universal rule !

But year after year the wise man died as the fool, and his children followed him, and neither among them had the Deliverer arisen, but must be looked for as before.

Again : " Prince of Peace ! " mused others. In this, all is comprehended. The conquering spoken of is but the overcoming of all wish for strife ; the rule in store, the sovereignty of love, suppressing all desires but that for universal joy.

Ah ! surely, when the Deliverer came it would be to make all men happy alike, and pour a healing balsam into every wound ! Then would all the old griefs be buried and forgotten, and the soothed mind of contented men trouble themselves no more with struggle and labour.



" WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES, AND LYING IN A MANGER "

Oh for the dawning of that morn when each man should be king and kingdom to himself, and the world resound once more to the songs of rejoicing which gladdened the golden age! Had not the Sibyls so spoken, and had not the Poet so sung? Then should every man sit under his own vine and his fig-tree, and poor and rich alike cease from the land, for all should be equal and all happy.

But whence should such a Deliverer be looked for—where be expected to rise?—Ah! surely only in some happy spot of Nature, some valley peaceful and beautiful as that of Cashmere, among a race of pastoral simplicity; in some perfect household, where disturbance was never known, and one mind prevailed. Thence alone could come He who would cause the cruel swords of war to be turned into ploughshares, and spears into reaping-hooks, and animate and inanimate nature to join in one general song of joy.

So these looked to the lovely valleys and the quiet nooks of Nature for the magic spot where discord had never entered. But they, too, looked and waited in vain—yet looked and waited on as before, and called upon Nature herself to confirm their hopes.

And the inanimate Earth awoke at last to the consciousness of some great approaching event, and listened to the whisper of deliverance, even as before she had suffered and sunk under the ancient curse. And spring by spring, as she adorned herself in beauty, putting on verdure and flowers, the sense of the Mighty One who was to restore and renovate her

lost glories swelled through every pulse. But she could not be troubled with the discordant expectations of men. . . . "Come as He will," she cried, "as King, as Conqueror, as Sage, as God : thus, thus, thus, in my bloom and beauty, do I make my self meet and ready for His advent ; thus, thus, thus am I worthy to receive my Lord and King ! When He comes shall not all the hills leap for joy, and the valleys laugh and sing, and the trees of the forest rejoice ? "

So spring after spring she adorned herself in hope, and, summer after summer, she glowed with longing expectation ; but spring and summer fled away and no Deliverer had come. And when the sap must return back again to the roots of trees and plants ; and flowers and leaves decay, and a torpor as of death prevail over them for awhile, she wept tears of regret while they took sad leave of each other, but said—"With a new season there will be hope once more." And Earth echoed the words, but, cold and desolate, she felt no confidence, and showed no signs of hope. Only the evergreens cheered her up, for said they, "While better things cannot be had, be contented with us ; at any rate we will remind you of what is to come."

Oh ignorant man and ignorant earth alike ! While darkness was over the mind of one, and deadness over the face of the other—when the eyes of the common world were fixed on earthly palaces, and the thoughts of the wise on the fruits of earthly wisdom ; yea, when the lovers of pleasure hoped for a Deliverer

in scenes of earthly enjoyment—behold, God had chosen “ the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; . . . the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; . . . and base things of the world, and things which are despised,” had He chosen, “ that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

Turn aside your eyes from earthly grandeurs, ye prisoners of hope ! Put away from your hearts the confidence of human wisdom ! Generation after generation had passed away, and the whole world lay yet in wickedness, for “ in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God ” ; and not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called by Him.

And then, lo ! in the stable of a village inn, where the beasts of the field were wont to take their rest, a weary foot-worn maiden had lain down for shelter and ease, for no other room could be found. And hark to the cry of a new-born babe which rose thence, unnoticed by the busy world without ! The first-born of a mother, whose husband earned their bread by daily toil—what mattered this common birth to other men ? Yet—hark to another cry which went up amidst the wailings of the lowly child : a cry of thanksgiving and praise. “ Glory be to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.” “ Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord ! ” And they who sang this glad Hosanna were the angels of Heaven !

Oh, day of glory and delight ! the Deliverer had

come at last ; the day of redemption was there ; but what was the sign whereby the long-expected Mighty One might be known ? Had kings at last given birth to him ? Had sages at last found him ?

Nay !—to simple shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night, was the news declared, amidst the shining of the glory of the Lord ; and the sign whereby He was to be known, was, that He should be found wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Oh, ignorant man and ignorant earth alike ! When the cry of that helpless infant broke forth in the shed of the village inn, who, untaught of Heaven, could have dreamt, that at that moment, and thus, the Desire of all nations had come among men ?

Yet thus, thus, thus, in the counsels of God it was decreed it should be ! Thus at His first coming He should come, an Example to all men.

Aye ! thus, thus, thus—in poverty and lowliness. Thus, thus, thus—while Nature lay torpid and hopeless, and half the world was winter-wrapt in snow. Thus, thus, thus—with healing on His wings, but not the healing they sought for : not a deliverance from death or sorrow, not a freedom from toil or pain, not even a ransom from temptation and sin ; but, behold, by the strength and wisdom of God's right hand, and the power of His holy Spirit, to make men through all these things " more than conquerors."

We strive after signs and wonders, we look for visible manifestations, we long for sensible experi-

ences, and when unanswered we fall back without a hope ; but how often, and often, and often, must the lesson of the Advent be repeated. Not always where and how we look for Him does the Divine One make His presence known to ourselves. Not always even when we are hopeful and earnest. Not always when in confidence we cry, " Thus, thus, thus, am I meet to receive my Lord and King," does He come indeed.

Then hang up the holly, the ivy and the yew, over the Christmas snows, as memorials of a hope which human reason could never teach. Not by the glories of summer was the Comforter ushered into the world. In the season of cold and of darkness He came to His own. In the winter and humiliation of our souls, when the robes of earthly righteousness have been laid aside, it may be He will draw near again. When learning and research cannot find Him, it may be He will reveal Himself to the simple in heart. When the expectations of great men perish, He may come with healing on His wings to the soul of the lowly and meek.



THE UNKNOWN LAND

“ But now they desire a better country.”—HEB. xi. 16.

IT mattered not to the Sedge Warbler whether it were night or day!

She built her nest down among the willows, and reeds, and long thick herbage that bordered the great river's side, and in her sheltered covert she sang songs of mirth and rejoicing both by day and night.

“ Where does the great river go to ? ” asked the little ones, as they peered out of their nest one lovely summer night, and saw the moonbeams dancing on the waters, as they hurried along. Now, the Sedge Warbler could not tell her children where the great river went to ; so she laughed, and said they must ask the Sparrow who chattered so fast, or the Swallow who travelled so far, next time one or other came to perch on the willow-tree to rest. “ And then,” said she, “ you will hear all such stories as these ! ”—and thereupon the Sedge Warbler tuned her voice to the Sparrow's note, and the little ones almost thought the Sparrow was there, the song was so like his—all about towns, and houses, and gardens, and fruit-trees, and cats, and guns ; only the Sedge Warbler made the account quite confused, for she had never had the patience to sit and listen to the Sparrow, so as readily to understand what he said about these matters.

But imperfect as the tale was, it amused the little

ones very much, and they tried then to sing like it, and sang till they fell asleep ; and when they awoke, they burst into singing again ; for, behold ! the eastern sky was red with the dawn, and they knew the warm sunbeams would soon send beautiful streaks of light in among the reeds and flags that sheltered their happy home.

Now, the Mother-bird would sometimes leave the little ones below, and go up into the willow-branches to sing alone ; and as the season advanced she did this oftener and oftener ; and her song was plaintive and tender then, for she used to sing to the tide of the river, as it swept along she knew not whither, and think that some day she and her husband and children should all be hurrying so onward as the river hurried,—she knew not whither also,—to the Unknown Land whence she had come. Yes ! I may call it the Unknown Land ; for only faint images remained upon her mind of the country whence she had flown.

At first she used to sing these ditties only when alone, but by degrees she began to let her little ones hear them now and then—for were they not going to accompany her ? and was it not as well, therefore, to accustom them gradually to think about it ?

Then the little ones asked her where the Unknown Land was. But she smiled, and said she could not tell them, for she did not know.

“ Perhaps the great river is travelling there all along,” thought the eldest child. But he was wrong. The great river was rolling on hurriedly to a mighty

city, where it was to stream through the arches of many bridges, and bear on its bosom the traffic of many nations : restless and crowded by day ; gloomy dark, and dangerous by night ! Ah ! what a contrast were the day and night of the mighty city to the day and night of the Sedge Warbler's home, where the twenty-four hours of changes God has appointed to Nature were but so many changes of beauty !

“ Mother, why do you sing songs about another land ? ” asked a young tender-hearted fledgling one day. “ Why should we leave the reed-beds and the willow-trees ? Cannot we all build nests here, and live here always ? Mother, do not let us go away anywhere else. I want no other land, and no other home but this. There are all the aits in the great river to choose from, where we shall each settle ; there can be nothing in the Unknown Land more pleasant than the reed-beds and the willow-trees here. I am so happy !—Leave off those dreadful songs ! ”

Then the Mother's breast heaved with many a varied thought, and she made no reply. So the little one went on—

“ Think of the red glow in the morning sky, Mother, and the soft haze—and then the beautiful rays of warm light across the waters ! Think of the grand noonday glare, when the broad flags and reeds are all burnished over with heat. Think of these evenings, Mother, when we can sit about in the branches—here, there, anywhere—and watch the great sun go down behind the sky ; or fly to the aits of the great river, and sing in the long green herbage

there, and then come home by moonlight, and sing till we fall asleep ; and wake singing again, if any noise disturb us, if a boat chance to paddle by, or some of those strange bright lights shoot up with a noise into the sky from distant gardens. Think, even when the rain comes down, how we enjoy ourselves, for then how sweet it is to huddle into the soft warm nest together, and listen to the drops pattering upon the flags and leaves overhead ! Oh, I love this dear, dear home so much !—Sing those dreadful songs about another land no more ! ”

Then the mother said :—

“ Listen to me, my child, and I will sing you another song.”

And the Sedge Warbler changed her note, and sang to her tender little one of her own young days, when she was as happy and as gay as now, though not here among the reed-beds ; and how, after she had lived and rejoiced in her happiness many pleasant months, a voice seemed to rise within her that said—“ *This is not your Rest !* ” and how she wondered, and tried not to listen, and tried to stop where she was, and be happy there still. But the voice came oftener and oftener, and louder and louder ; and how the dear partner she had chosen heard and felt the same ; and how at last they left their home together, and came and settled down among the reed-beds of the great river. And, oh, how happy she had been !

“ And where is the place you came from, Mother ? ” asked the little one. “ Is it anywhere near, that we may go and see it ? ”

"My child," answered the Sedge Warbler, "it is the Unknown Land! Far, far away, I know: but *where*, I do not know. Only the voice that called me thence is beginning to call again. And, as I was obedient and hopeful once, shall I be less obedient and hopeful now—now that I have been so happy? No, my little one, let us go forth to the Unknown Land, wherever it may be, in joyful trust."

"You will be with me;—so I will," murmured the little Sedge Warbler in reply; and before she went to sleep she joined her young voice with her mother's in the song of the Unknown Land.

One day afterwards, when the parent birds had gone off to the sedgy banks of a neighbouring stream, another of the young ones flew to the topmost branches of some willow-trees, and, delighted with his position, began to sing merrily, as he swung backwards and forwards on a bough. Many were the songs he tried, and well enough he succeeded for his age, and at last he tried the song of the Unknown Land.

"A pretty tune, and a pretty voice, and a pretty singer!" remarked a Magpie, who unluckily was crossing the country at the time, and whose mischievous spirit made him stop to amuse himself, by showing off to the young one his superior wisdom, as he thought it.

"I have been in many places, and even once was domesticated about the house of a human creature, so that I am a pretty good judge of singing," continued Mr. Mag, with a cock of his tail, as he balanced

himself on a branch near the Sedge Warbler ; “ but, upon my word, I have seldom heard a prettier song than yours—only I wish you would tell me what it is all about.”

“ It is about the Unknown Land,” answered the young Warbler, with modest pleasure, and very innocently.

“ Do I hear you right, my little friend ? ” inquired the Magpie, with mock solemnity—“ The *Unknown* Land, did you say ? Dear, dear ! to think of finding such abstruse philosophy among the marshes and ditches ! It is quite a treat ! And pray, now, what is there that you can tell an odd old fellow like me, who am always anxious to improve myself, about this Unknown Land ? ”

“ I don’t know, except that we are going there some day,” answered the Sedge Warbler, rather confused by the Magpie’s manner.

“ Now, that is excellent ! ” returned the Magpie, chuckling with laughter. “ How I love simplicity ! and, really, you are a choice specimen of it, Mr. Sedge Warbler. So you are thinking of a journey to this Unknown Land, always supposing, of course, my sweet little friend, that you can find the way to it, which, between you and me, I think there must naturally be some doubt about, under the circumstances of the place itself being unknown ; Good evening to you, pretty Mr. Sedge Warbler, I wish you a pleasant journey ! ”

“ Oh, stop, stop ! ” cried the young bird, now quite distressed by the Magpie’s ridicule ; “ don’t go just

yet, pray. Tell me what you think yourself about the Unknown Land."

"Oh, you little wiseacre, are you laughing at me? Why, what can *any* body, even so clever a creature as yourself, *think* about an *unknown* thing? You can *guess*, I admit, anything you please about it, and so could I, if I thought it worth while to waste my time so foolishly. But you will never get beyond *guessing* in such a case—at all events, I confess *my* poor abilities can't pretend to do anything more."

"Then you are not going there yourself?" murmured the overpowered youngster.

"Certainly not. In the first place, I am quite contented where I am; and, in the second place, I am not quite so easy of belief as you seem to be. How do I know there is such a place as this Unknown Land at all?"

"My father and mother told me that," answered the Sedge Warbler, with more confidence.

"Oh, your father and mother told you, did they?" sneered the Magpie, scornfully. "And you are a good little bird, and believe everything your father and mother tell you. And if they were to tell you you were going to live up in the moon, you would believe them, I suppose?"

"They never deceived me yet!" cried the young Sedge Warbler, firmly, his feathers ruffling with indignation as he spoke.

"Hoity, toity! what's the matter, now, my dainty little cock? Who said your father and mother *had* ever deceived you? But, without being a bit

deceitful, I take the liberty to inform you that they may be extremely *ignorant*. And I shall leave you to decide which of the two, yourself ; for I declare, one gets nothing but annoyance by trying to be good-natured to you countrified young fellows. You are not fit to converse with a bird of any experience and wisdom. So, once for all, good-bye to you ! ”

And the Magpie flapped his wings, and was gone before the Sedge Warbler had half recovered from his fit of vexation.

There was a decided change in the weather that evening, for the summer was now far advanced, and a sudden storm had brought cooler breezes and more rain than usual, and the young birds wondered, and were sad when they saw the dark sky, and the swollen river, and felt that there was no warm sunshine to dry the wet, as was usual after a mid-day shower.

“ Why is the sky so cloudy and lowering, and why is the river so thick and gloomy, and why is there no sunshine, I wonder ? ” said one.

“ The sun will shine again to-morrow, I dare say,” was the Mother’s answer ; “ but the days are shortening fast ; and the storm has made this one very short ; and the sun will not get through the clouds this evening. Never mind ! the wet has not hurt the inside of our nest. Get into it, my dear ones, and keep warm, while I sing to you about our journey. Silly children, did you expect the sunshine to last here for ever ? ”

“ I hoped it might, and thought it would once, but

lately I have seen a change," answered the young one who had talked to her mother so much before. "And I do not mind now, Mother. When the sunshine goes, and the wet comes, and the river looks dark and the sky black, I think about the Unknown Land."

Then the Mother was pleased, and, perched upon a tall flag outside the nest, she sang a hopeful song of the Unknown Land; and the father and children joined—all but *one*! He, poor fellow, would not, could not sing; but when the voices ceased, he murmured to his brothers and sisters in the nest—

"This would be all very pleasant and nice, if we could *know* anything about the Land we talk about."

"If we were to know too much, perhaps we should never be satisfied here," laughed the tender little one, who had formerly been so much distressed about going.

"But we know *nothing*," rejoined the other bird; "indeed, how do we know there is such a place as the Unknown Land at all?"

"We *feel* that there is, at any rate," answered the Sister-bird. "I have heard the call our mother tells about, and so must *you* have done."

"You fancy you have heard it, that is to say," cried the Brother; "because she told you. It is all fancy, all guess-work; no knowledge! I could fancy I heard it too, only I will not be so weak and silly; I will neither think about going, nor will I go."

"*This is not your Rest*," sang the Mother, in a loud clear voice, outside; and "*This is not your Rest*," echoed the others in sweet unison; and "*This is not*

your Rest," sounded in the depths of the poor little Sedge Warbler's own heart.

"This is not our Rest!" repeated the Mother. "The river is rushing forward; the clouds are hurrying onward; the winds are sweeping past, because here is not their Rest. Ask the river, ask the clouds, ask the winds where they go to:—Another Land! Ask the great sun, as he descends away out of sight, where he goes to:—Another Land! And when the appointed time shall come, let us also arise and go hence."

"Oh! Mother, Mother, would that I could believe you! Where is that other Land?" Thus cried the distressed doubter in the nest. And then he opened his troubled heart, and told what the Magpie had said, and the parent birds listened in silence, and when he ceased—

"Listen to me, my son," exclaimed the Mother, "and I will sing you another song."

Whereupon she spoke once more of the land she had left before; but now the burden of her story was, that she had left it *without knowing why*. She "went out not knowing whither,"—in blind obedience, faith, and hope. As she traversed the wide waste of waters, there was no one to give her *reasons* for her flight, or tell her, "This and this will be your lot." Could the Magpie have told her, had he met her there? But had she been deceived? No! The secret voice which had called and led her forth had been one of Kindness. When she came to the reed-beds she knew all about it. For then arose the

strong desire to settle. Then she and her dear partner lived together. And then came the thought that she must build a nest. Ah! had the Magpie seen her then, building a home for children yet unborn, how he would have mocked at her! What could she *know*, he would have asked, about the future? Was it not all *guess-work*, fancy, folly? But had she been deceived? No! It was that voice of Kindness that had told her what to do. For did she not become the happy mother of children? And was she not now able to comfort and advise her little ones in their troubles? For, let the Magpie say what he would, was it likely that the voice of Kindness would deceive them at last? "No!" cried she; "in joyful trust let us obey the call, though now we know not why. When obedience and faith are made perfect, it may be that knowledge and explanation shall be given." So ended the Mother's strain, and no sad misgivings ever clouded the Sedge Warbler's home again.

Several weeks of changing autumn weather followed after this, and the chilly mornings and evenings caused the songs of departure to sound louder and more cheerily than ever in the reed-beds. They knew, they felt, they had confidence, that there was joy for them in the Unknown Land. But one dark morning, when all were busy in various directions, a sudden loud sound startled the young ones from their sports, and in terror and confusion they hurried home. The old nest looked looser and more untidy than ever that day, for some water had oozed

in through the half-worn bottom. But they huddled together into it, as of old, for safety. Soon, however, it was discovered that neither Father nor Mother were there ; and after waiting in vain some time for their return, the frightened young ones flew off again to seek them.

Oh ! weary, weary search for the missing ones we love ! It may be doubted whether the sad reality, when they came upon it, exceeded the agony of that hour's suspense.

It ended, however, at last ! On a patch of long rank herbage which covered a mud bank, so wet that the cruel sportsman could not follow to secure his prey, lay the stricken parent birds. One was already dead, but the mother still lived, and as her children's wail of sorrow sounded in her ear, she murmured out a last gentle strain of hope and comfort.

" Away, away, my darlings, to the Unknown Land. The voice that has called to all our race before, and never but for kindness, is calling to you now ! Obey ! Go forth in joyful trust ! Quick ! Quick ! There's no time to be lost."

" But my Father—you, oh, my Mother ! " cried the young ones.

" Hush, sweet ones, hush ! We cannot be with you *there*. But there may be some other Unknown Land which *this* may lead to " ; and the Mother laid her head against her wounded side and died.

Long before the sunbeams could pierce the heavy haze of the next autumn morning, the young Sedge Warblers rose for the last time over their much-

loved reed-beds, and took flight—" they knew not whither."

Dim and undefined hope, perhaps, they had, that they might find their parents again in the Unknown Land. And if one pang of grief struck them when these hopes ended, it was but for a moment, for, said the Brother-bird—

" There *may* be some other Unknown Land, better even than this, to which they may be gone."



WAITING

“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait.”—LAM. iii. 26.

It was, doubtless, a very sorry life the House Cricket led, before houses were built and fires were kindled. There was no comfortable kitchen hearth then, in the warm nooks and corners of which he might sit and sing his cheerful song, coming out every now and then to bask himself in the glow of the blazing light. On the contrary, he, so fond of heat, had no place to shelter in but holes in hollow trees, or crevices in rocks and stones, or some equally dull and damp abode. Besides which, he had to bear the incessant taunts and ridicule of creatures who were perfectly comfortable themselves, and so had no fellow-feeling for his want of cheerfulness.

“Why don’t you go and spring about, and sing in the fields with your cousin, the Grasshopper?” was the ill-natured question of the Spider, as she twisted her web in one of the refuge-holes the Cricket had crept into; “I am sure your legs are long enough, if you would only take the trouble to undouble them. It’s nothing but a sulky, discontented feeling that keeps you and all your family moping in these out-of-the-way corners, when you ought to be using your limbs in jumping about and enjoying yourself. And

I dare say, too, that you could sing a great deal louder if you chose."

The Cricket thought, perhaps he could,—but he must feel very differently to what he did then, before it would be possible to try. Something was so very, very wrong with him, but what that something was he did not know. All the other beasts and birds and insects seemed easy and happy enough. The Spider, for instance, was quite at home and gay in the hole *he* found so dismal. And it was not the Spider only who was contented : the Flies—the Bees—the Ants—the very Mole, who sometimes came up from burrowing, and told wonderful stories of his underground delights—the birds with their merry songs—the huge beasts, who walked about like giants in the fields—all—all were satisfied with their condition, and happy in themselves. Every one had the home he liked, and no one envied the other.

But with him it was quite otherwise ; he never felt at home ! On the contrary, it always seemed to him that he was looking out for something that was not there—some place that could never be found—some state where he could rise out of the depression and uneasiness which here seemed to clog him down, though he could not understand why. Poor fellow ! as things were now, he felt for ever driven to hide in holes, although he knew that his limbs were built for energy ; and few ever heard his voice, though he possessed one fitted for something much better than doleful complaints.

Sometimes a set of House Crickets would meet and

talk the matter over. They looked at their long folded up legs, and could not but see how exactly they were like those of the Grasshopper. And yet the idea of following the Grasshopper into the cool grass, and jumping about all day, was odious to them. Once, indeed, a Cricket of great self-denial offered to go into the fields and find one of his green cousins, and ask his opinion on the subject, and whether he could give any reason why the grasshopper life should be so distasteful to such near relations. And he actually went; and when the Grasshopper could be persuaded to stand quiet for a few seconds, and listen, he was so much concerned for the Crickets (for he had a tender heart, from living so much in the grass, and being so musical), that he said he would himself visit his cousins, and see what could be done for them. Perhaps it was some trifling accidental ailment, or it might be a chronic affection in the family, owing to mismanagement when they were young, but which a little judicious treatment would correct.

With these views, he started for the hollow tree in which the Crickets had taken shelter, and soon reached it, for he travelled the whole way in bounds. And the last bound took him fairly into the midst of the family circle, in which indeed he alighted with more vivacity than politeness, for his cousins did not like such startling gaiety. However, he steadied himself carefully, and then began to examine the legs and knees of all the Crickets assembled. He drew them out, and looked them well over; for, thought he, "there is perhaps some blunder or flaw in the

way the joints are put together." But he could find nothing amiss. There sat the Crickets with legs and bodies as nicely made as his own, only with no energy for exertion.

What he might have thought, or what he might have said, after this puzzling discovery, no one can tell ; for at the end of his examination he was seized with the fidgets, and, " Excuse me, my dear friends," cried he, " I have the cramp in my left leg—I *must* jump ! " And jump he did—once, twice, thrice—and the last jump carried him out of the tree ; and either on purpose, or from forgetfulness, he sprang singing away, and returned to his cousins the Crickets no more.

Oh, this yearning after some other better state that lies unrevealed in the indefinite future—how restless and disheartening a sensation ! Oh, this witnessing of perfection in all created things around, when one's own fate is the solitary exception to the rule—how painful the contrast ! How cruel, how almost overwhelming, the struggle between the iron chain of reality and the soaring wing of aspiration !

But, " What is the use, my poor good friends," espostulated a plodding old Mole one day, after coming out to see how the upper world went on, and hearing the Cricket's complaints—" what is the use of all this groaning and conjecturing ? You admit that every other creature but yourself is perfect in its way, and quite happy. Well, then, I will tell you that you ought to be quite sure you are perfect in your way too, though you have not found it out yet ;

and that you will be happy one day or other, although it may not be the case just now. Do you suppose this fine scheme of things we live in is to be soiled with one speck of dirt, as it were, for the sake of teasing such a little insignificant creature as yourself ! Don't think it for a moment, for it is not at all likely ! But you must not suppose that everything goes right at first even with the best of us. I have had some small experience, and I know. But everything fits in at last. Of that I am quite sure. For instance, now, I do not suppose it ever occurred to you to think what a trial it must be to a young Mole when he first begins to burrow in the earth. Do you imagine that he knows what he is doing it for, or what will be the result ? No such thing. It is a complete working in the dark, not knowing in the least where he is going. Dear me ! if one had once stopped to conjecture and puzzle, what a hardship it would have seemed to drive one's nose by the hour together into unknown ground, for some unexplained reason that did not come out for some time afterwards, and that one had no certainty would ever come out at all ! But everything fits in at last. And so it did with us. I remember it quite well in my own case. We drove the earth away and outwards, till the space so cleared proved an absolute palace ! By the bye, I must try and get you down into our splendid abode—it will cheer you up, and teach you a useful lesson. Well, so you see we found out at last what all the grubbing had been for——”

“ Ah ! but,” interrupted the Cricket, “ you were

labouring for *some* purpose all the time, and if I had to labour I could hope. The difficulty is, to sit moping with nothing to do but *wait*."

"It is nonsense to talk of nothing to do," answered the Mole; "every creature has *something* to do. You, for instance, have always to watch for the sun. You know you like the beams and warmth he sends out better than anything else in the world, so you should get into the way of them as much as you can. And after the sun has set, you must hunt up the snuggest holes you can find, and so make the best of things as they are; and for the rest, you must *wait*. And waiting answers sometimes as well as working, I can assure you. There was the young Ox in the plains near here. As soon as he could run about at all, he began driving his clumsy head against everything he met. No one could tell why; but he fidgeted and butted about all day long, and many of his friends and acquaintance were very much offended by his manners. Others laughed. The dogs, indeed, were particularly amused, and used to bark at him constantly—even close to his nose sometimes, as he lowered his head after them. Well, at last, out came the secret. Two fine horns grew out from our friend's head, and people soon understood the meaning of all the butting; and one of the saucy curs who was playing the old barking game with him one day got finely tossed for his pains. Everything fits in at last, my friends! No cravings are given in vain. There is always something in store to account for them, you may be quite sure. You

may have to wait a bit—some of you a shorter, some a longer time ; but *do* wait—and everything will fit in and be perfect at last.”

It was a most fortunate circumstance for the Crickets that the Mole happened to give them this good advice ; for a malicious Ape had lately been suggesting to them, whether, as they were totally useless and very unhappy, it would not be a good thing for them all to starve themselves to death, or in some other way to rid the world of their whole race. But the Mole’s good sense gave a different turn to their ideas ; and hope is so natural and pleasant a feeling, that when once they ventured to encourage it, it flourished and grew in their hearts till it created a sort of happiness itself. In short, they determined to *wait*, and meantime to watch for the sun, as their friend had advised.

There are not many records of the early history of the House Crickets ; but it is supposed that they travelled about a good deal—preferring always the hottest countries ; and rumours of a few straggling families, who had discovered a sort of Cricket Elysium at the mouth of volcanoes, were afloat at one time. But the truth of the report was never ascertained : and as, doubtless, if ever they got there, they were sure to be swept away to destruction by the first eruption that took place, it is no wonder that the fact has never been thoroughly established.

Meanwhile several generations died off ; and things remained much as they were. But the words of the Mole were carried down from father to son, and

became a byeword of comfort among them:—"Everything will fit in at last ! no cravings are given in vain. There is always something in store to account for them. *Wait*—and everything will fit in, and be perfect at last."

Gleams of hope, indeed, were not wanting to our poor little friends, during this time of probation. Wherever fires were kindled by human hands, whether by wanderers in the depths of forests, or sojourners in tents, a stir of excitement and rapturous expectation was caused among such Crickets as were near enough to know and enjoy the circumstance. But, alas ! when the travellers journeyed onwards, or the tents were removed elsewhere, the disappointment that ensued was bitter in proportion.

Many an evil hint, too, had they on such occasions from the mischief-making creatures which are to be found in all grades of life, that such, and no better, would be their fate for ever. Rays of joy, beaming only to be extinguished in cruel mockery of their feelings—such was to be their perpetual portion !

"But we *will* not believe it," cried the Crickets, heartbroken as they were. "Everything will be perfect at last," sang they as loudly as they could. "No cravings are given in vain." And as they always sang this same song, the mischief-makers got tired of listening at last, and left them to sing and weep alone. Ah ! it required no small strength of mind to resist, as they did, such plausible insinuations, supported as they were by present appearances.

But, truly, though it tarried, the day of deliver-

ance and joy did come ! The first fire that ever warmed the hearthstone that flagged the grand old chimney-arch of ancient times ended for ever the mystery of the House Crickets' wants and cravings ; and when it commonly blazed every winter night in men's dwellings, all the doubts and woes of Cricket life were over. These seemed to have passed away like the dreams of a disturbed night, which had been succeeded by daylight and reality. And oh, what ecstasy of joy the Crickets felt ! How loud they shouted, and how high they sprang ! " We knew it would be so ! The good old Mole was right ! The grumbling beasts were wrong ! Everything is perfect now, and no one is so happy as we are."

" Grandmother, what creature is it that I hear singing so loudly in the corner by the fire ? " inquires the little one of the good old dame who sits musing on the oaken settle.

" I do not hear it, my child, and I do not know," answers the deaf and blind old crone. " But if it be singing, love, it is happy, and enjoys these blessed fires as much as I do. ' Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.' "

Ah ! it was no wonder that amidst the many merry voices that then shouted, and still shout, round those warm and friendly fires, no voice is louder, no joy more grateful, than that of the patient Cricket. He has " waited " through fear and shadows—has hoped through darkness and ignorance—and his abode now glows with warmth and light. And, if he received a lesson of wisdom from a creature more humble and

seemingly more blind than himself, it is at least not the only instance in which instruction has been so obtained.

And now we know the reason why the Crickets come by troops into our houses, and live and thrive about our cheering fires, and sing so loud and long that the housewives sometimes (I grieve to say) get weary of the noise, and try to lessen the number of their lively visitors. But yet, there is a strange old notion of good fortune attending the presence of these little chirping creatures. They are welcomed as bringing "good luck" to the family about whose hearth they settle. And so they do! They bring with them a tale of promises made good. They sing a song of hope fulfilled; and though in that glad music there be neither speech nor language which we can recognise as such, there is yet a voice to be heard among them by all who love to listen, with reverent delight, to the sweet harmonies and deep analogies of Nature.



BIRDS IN THE NEST

“ Safe in the hand of one disposing pow’r,
 Or in the natal, or the mortal hour,
 All Nature is but art, unknown to thee ;
 All chance, direction, which thou canst not see.”
 POPE’S “ *Essay on Man*.”

ONCE upon a time there was in a wood a nest which held eight of the dearest little eggs a hen-mother ever looked upon with joy. At least this particular hen-mother thought so, and her mate rather agreed with her when they talked the matter over together. And his opinion had weight, for in his flights he sometimes saw other eggs, and would tell her about them on his return. But what could they be to her own? Nothing could be better than what was perfect, and her own were perfect in her eyes. What a fine shape they had! How beautifully rounded! How soft their tint! How tasteful the arrangement of spots! All others must needs be too light or too dark, or too something or other, to suit her particular taste. The sea-gull, who ate snails in the garden, boasted of his family egg as twenty times larger and twenty times more beautiful. “ But if it *be* more beautiful, what can that matter to us,” said the hen-mother, in conclusion, “ when ours are perfect in our eyes, and we are so very happy? ”

“ And shall be so much happier yet,” pursued her

mate, who, as a travelled bird, had had experience, and knew what was in store ; “ when the little ones awake to a life and enjoyment of their own, and can feed and sing, and know and love us both.”

“ Ah, to be sure, to be sure, that will be rapture indeed,” cried the hen-mother. “ Thank you so much for telling me ! How silly I was, thinking I was as happy as I could possibly be ! Of course I shall be happier by-and-bye ; and how *very* happy that will be, for I am happy enough now. I wish the day were come ! ”

Yet she was very happy ; but most so when she forgot she was to be happier still.

And by-and-bye the time came ; and when the little ones were all hatched, and could peer about and see their father bringing food, and open their mouths and swallow it very fast, and cry for more,—

“ Now then, at last the happiness is perfect,” said the hen-mother ; “ I have nothing further to wish for.”

And she watched them being fed and satisfied, and never felt hungry herself, till they had had plenty and were at ease.

“ Eight darlings in one nest ! What a sight to fill one’s heart ! There may be trouble enough, it’s true, and very little room to rest ; but one’s own eight beautiful creatures round one, under one’s wing, all chirping and alive—this is perfection of happiness, indeed ! ”

“ You cannot say so just yet,” sang the mate ; but he did not tell her this quite at first. He waited for

a soft evening in early summer before he piped about what was in store.

“ You cannot say so just yet. Our darlings are very sweet, but they are poor helpless things at present. Wait till they have grown more feathers, have learnt to take care of themselves, and fly and sing. They cannot be perfect, nor can your happiness be perfect, till then. Some of our neighbours are beforehand with us. There were fine young birds among the boughs yesterday, twitting our youngsters in their songs with being behindhand altogether.”

“ They will not have to twit long, I suppose,” exclaimed the hen-mother, rather angrily. “ Of course you will bring ours forward as fast as you can. Of course they must not be behind their neighbours. Of course they must learn to take care of themselves, and fly and sing like the rest. Dear, dear ! how silly I was ! But thank you so much for telling me. It’s very well to be easily pleased, and the poor helpless things are very sweet, as you say ; but of course it will be a much grander thing when they have grown to be fine young birds like those others ; able to take care of themselves and to twit their neighbours who can’t. And of course I shall be as happy again. I wish the time were come.”

And it did come ; but there was a great deal of trouble to be taken first. The little ones had to be nursed and fed till their feathers had grown, and then they had to be trained, by slow degrees and with much care, to use their young wings in flight. Now the hen-mother had left her mate no rest till he began

to teach ; for, first she was jealous for her children's credit ; and secondly, she wanted to feel what it was to be as happy as it was possible to be. Happy enough she was, but for this wish.

But alas ! for the trouble and fear that came over her when the teaching really began. The eight darlings must come out of their nest, from under her wing ; she could help them no longer ; they could scarcely help themselves. Yet they must spread the feeble pinion, and strain the unpractised muscle, and run a risk of failure, and even life, to insure success.

Oh, poor hen-mother, what a trying change was this, though brought about by her own especial desire ! No wonder that, while the teaching was going on, she would sit and shake with fright, and wish all manner of foolish things : that they were back in the nest, of course ; but far more than that—even that they were back in the old baby days again, in the egg-shells of their first existence, unconscious of life and of them. “ They were all under my wing then, at any rate,” said she ; “ my own dear little ones with me, and I with them : what more could I want ? ”

And, oh dear, when the youngsters were safe in the nest once more at night, how she used to gather them under her wings with joy !

“ I am getting to like night better than day,” said she at last to her mate, “ for then my birds are in the nest again. You are training them very cleverly, I know, and I was the first to want them to be clever



"THE EIGHT DARLINGS MUST COME OUT OF THEIR NEST."

like other young birds, and they are getting cleverer day by day, I dare say, so I ought to be happier ; but the happiness is not as pleasant as it was. How can it be, when they are away so much, and the empty nest stares me in the face ? The risks are so many too, till they can really fly well, and I tremble with fear. But all is right at night, when you all come back and sing. Yes, if it wasn't for thinking of the morrow, the happiness would be perfect indeed then : if it were always evening, I mean, and they and you were always here."

" It is natural you should feel as you do," replied the mate ; " but you mistake the cause. If you are not quite happy yet, it is merely because things are not quite perfect, that is all. When the young ones can fly really well, for instance, there will no longer be any risk ; and when they can sing better still, our music will be pleasanter than ever ; and when they are able and independent, all our cares and anxieties will be at an end. Wait a little longer, and you will be happy indeed."

The hen-mother sighed. " I suppose you must be right," said she ; " I will wait. But if I could sing myself, I would sing a mother's song about the birds in the nest. It may not have been perfection, but it was a very happy time."

So she waited and did her best to be pleased. But for longer and longer intervals the empty nest stared her in the face, and she thought many things she did not dare to say—even the old foolish wish that they were all in their egg-shells again.

Still, every evening, when they came back and perched in the boughs, if not in the nest, and the singing grew sweeter and sweeter, she cheered up and rejoiced once more.

And now at last the nestlings were full-grown birds, and could fly and sing as well as their parents. Perfection had come; they were independent; nobody's young birds could twit them now. "But now, of course," said their father, "they must go out and seek their fortunes, as we did, and choose mates, and settle in life for themselves. You see the justice of this?"

The hen-mother, to whom he was speaking, answered, "Yes"; but her heart was half broken. And when he added, "This is the real perfection of happiness to parents," she made no answer at all.

"It ought to be, perhaps," thought she to herself, "but it isn't so with me. I wonder why?" She sat on the edge of the empty nest and wondered still; but she couldn't find out the secret there.

Then the young ones piped to her from the woods; and at last said she, "Things are altered, I see; I will go to them!" and the very thought comforted her as she flew away. And when she had found them, and watched them in the full enjoyment of their own young life—listened to them as they warbled merrily to each other among the trees, or sported with friends here and there, she began to understand the whole matter. She was rejoicing in their joy rather than in her own.

And time went on: and one day as she sat, so

listening, on a branch in the centre of the wood, her mate by her side, said she, " It is all becoming quite clear, and I can see that you were right on the whole. This is nearer the perfection of happiness than anything else could be, but the quite perfect is not to be had. Still, this is nearest and best ; whether sweetest or not, I scarcely know. But thank you for telling me ! I was selfish before : wanted my own darlings to myself, under my own wing, in my own particular nest—safe, as I called it—foolish that I was ! Oh, narrow, narrow thought ! As if one place was safer than another, when the sun looks down everywhere, streaming warmth and comfort upon all ! I see things differently now. The wood is but a larger nest, and those that live in it but a larger family. I spread out my love a little wider, and behold my happiness spreads out too. Though each in turn, for a time, must form his own little circle of joy, the whole must form one larger circle together ; and who knows where it is to end ? "

She ceased, and then listened again, and truly the wood was ringing with melodies : her mate by her side ; her children now here, now there with the dear ones they loved. The circle grew wider and wider as time went further on.

But by-and-bye, when age had crept over both, the mate had tender thoughts himself of old times, and tenderer still for her. She had not been wrong altogether, he whispered softly and kindly. It was not selfishness only that had filled her heart. He would sing her the song she used to wish she could

have sung herself—a mother's song about the birds in the nest.

And it went to the hearts of both.

* * * * *

Other mothers in other nests, lift up your souls, as the circle widens from your feet. "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all," has all together now in the circle of His care; yea, even though a world, or the change we call death, may seem to divide them: and HE will bring His own together at last into one home—the "Father's House":—one home, be the mansions never so many!



DAILY BREAD

“Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”—MATT. vi. 32.

“I WISH your cheerfulness were a little better timed, my friend,” remarked a Tortoise, who for many years had inhabited the garden of a suburban villa, to a Robin Redbreast, who was trilling a merry note from a thorn-tree in the shrubbery. “What in the world are you singing about at this time of year, when I and everybody else of any sense are trying to go to sleep, and forget ourselves?”

“I beg your pardon, I am sure,” replied the Robin; “I did not know it would have disturbed you.”

“You must be gifted with very small powers of observation, then, my friend,” rejoined the Tortoise. “Here have I been grubbing my head under the leaves and sticks half the morning, to make myself a comfortable hole to take a nap in; and always, just as I am dropping off, you set up one of your senseless pipes.”

“You are not over-troubled with politeness, good sir, I think,” observed the Robin; “to call my performance by such an offensive name, and to find fault with me for want of observation, is the most unreasonable thing in the world. This is the first season I have lived in the garden, and neither in the spring nor in the few musical moments of summer have you ever objected to my singing. How was I to know you would dislike it now?”

“Your own sense might have told you as much, without my giving myself the trouble of explanation,” persisted the Tortoise. “Of course, it’s natural enough, and not disagreeable, to hear you little birds singing round the place, when there is something to sing about. It rather raises one’s spirits than otherwise. For instance, when the weather becomes mild in the early year, and the plants begin to grow and get juicy, and it is about time for me to get up from my winter’s sleep, I have no objection to be awakened by your voices. But now, in this miserable season, when the fruits and flowers are gone, and when even the leaves that are left are tough and dry, and there is not a dandelion that I care to eat ; and when it gets colder and colder, and damper and damper every day, this affectation of merriment on your part is both ridiculous and hypocritical. It is impossible that you can feel happy yourself, and you have no business to pretend to it.”

“But, begging your pardon once more, good sir, I do feel happy, whatever you may think to the contrary,” answered the Robin.

“What, do you mean to say that you *like* cold, and damp, and bare trees, with scarcely a berry upon them ? ”

“I like warm sunny days the best, perhaps,” replied the Robin, “if I am obliged to think about it and make comparisons. But why should I do so ? I am quite comfortable as it is. If there is not so much variety of food as there has been, there is, at any rate, enough for every day, and everybody knows

that enough is as good as a feast. For my part, I don't see how I can help being contented."

"Contented! what a dull idea, to be just contented! I am contented myself, after a fashion; but you are trying to seem happy, and that is a very different sort of thing."

"Well, but happy; I am happy, too," insisted the Robin.

"That must be then because you know nothing of what is coming," suggested the Tortoise. "As yet, while the open weather lasts, you can pick up your favourite worms, and satisfy your appetite. But, when the ground has become so hard that the worms cannot come through, or your beak get at them, what will you do?"

"Are you sure that will ever happen?" inquired the Robin.

"Oh! certainly, in the course of the winter, at some time or another; and, indeed, it may happen any day now, which makes me anxious to be asleep and out of the way."

"Oh, well, if it happens now, I shall not mind a bit," cried the Robin; "there are plenty of berries left!"

"But supposing it should happen when all the berries are gone?" said the Tortoise, actually teased at not being able to frighten the Robin out of his singing propensities.

"Nay, but if it comes to *supposing*," exclaimed the Robin, "I shall suppose it won't, and so I shall be happy still."

"But I say it *may* happen," shouted the Tortoise.

"And I ask *will* it?" rejoined the Robin, in quite as determined a manner.

"Which you know I cannot answer," retorted the Tortoise again. "Nobody knows exactly either about the weather or the berries beforehand."

"Then let nobody trouble themselves beforehand," persisted the Robin. "If there was anything to be done to prevent or provide, it would be different. But as it is, we have nothing to do but to be happy in the comfort each day brings." Here the Robin trilled out a few of his favourite notes, but the Tortoise soon interrupted him.

"Allow other people to be happy, then, as well as yourself, and cease squalling out of that tree. I could have forgiven you, had the branches been full of haws; but, as they are all withered or eaten, you can have no particular excuse for singing in that particular bush, rather than elsewhere, so let me request you at once to go."

"Of course I will do so," answered the Robin, politely. "It is the same thing to me exactly, so I wish you a good morning, and if you desire it, a refreshing sleep."

So saying, the Robin flew from the thorn-tree to another part of the grounds, where he could amuse himself without interruption; and the Tortoise began to hustle under the leaves and rubbish again, with a view to taking his nap.

But by-and-by, as the morning wore away, the frosty feeling and autumnal mists cleared off; and when the sun came out, which it did for three or four hours in the early afternoon, the day became really fine.

The old Tortoise did not fail to discover the fact ; and not having yet scratched himself a hole completely to his mind, he came out of the shrubbery and took a turn in the sunshine.

“ This is quite a surprise, indeed,” said he to himself. “ It is very pleasant, but I am afraid it will not last. The more’s the pity ; but, however, I shall not go to bed just yet.”

With these words, he waddled slowly along to the kitchen garden, where he was in the habit of occasionally basking under the brick wall ; and now, tilting himself up sideways against it, he passed an hour, much to his satisfaction, in exposing his horny coat to the rays of the sun ; a feat which he never dared to perform during the heats of summer.

Meanwhile the poor little Robin continued his songs in a retired corner of the grounds, where no one objected to his cheerful notes. A tiny grove it was, with a grassy circle in the middle of it, where a pretty fountain played night and day.

During the pauses of his music, and especially after the sun came out, he wondered much to himself about all the strange uncomfortable things the Tortoise had said. Oh, to think of his having wanted to go to sleep and be out of the way ; and now here was the sunshine making all the grove as warm as spring itself ! If he had not been afraid the Tortoise might consider him intrusive, he would have gone back and told him how warm and pleasant it was ; but absolutely he durst not.

Still, he could not, on reflection, shut his eyes to

the fact, that there were no other songsters in the grove just then beside himself, and he wondered what was the reason. Time was, when the Nightingale was to be heard every night in this very spot ; but, now he came to think of it, that beautiful pipe of his had ceased for months ; and where the bird himself was, nobody seemed to know.

The Robin became thoughtful, and perhaps a little uneasy.

There was the Blackbird, too ;—what was he about that he also was silent ; Was it possible that all the world was really, as the Tortoise said, thinking it wise to go to sleep and be out of the way ?

The Robin got almost alarmed. So much so, that he flew about, until he met with a Blackbird, whom he might question on the subject, and of whom he made the inquiry, why he had left off singing ?

The Blackbird glanced at him with astonishment.

“ Who *does* sing in the dismal autumn and winter ? ” said he. “ Really, I know of scarcely any who are bold and thoughtless enough to do so, except yourself. The Larks may, to be sure, but they lead such strange lives in the sky, or in seclusion, that they are no rule for any one else. Your own persevering chirruping is (in my humble judgment) so out of character with a season in which every wise creature must be apprehensive for the future, that I can only excuse it on the ground of an ignorance and levity which you have had no opportunity of correcting.”

“ It would be kinder to attribute it to a cheerful contentment with whatever comes to pass,” cried

the Robin, ruffling his feathers as he spoke. "I rejoice in each day's blessing as it comes, and never wish for more than does come. *You*, who are wishing the present to be better than it is, and fearing that the future may be worse, are meanwhile losing all enjoyment of the hour that now is. You think this wise. To me it seems as foolish as it is ungrateful!"

With these words the Robin flew away as fast as he could, for, to say the truth, he felt conscious of having been a little impertinent in his last remark. He was rather a young bird to be setting other people right; but a Robin is always a bold fellow, and has moreover rather a hot temper of his own, though he is a kind creature at the bottom. He had been insulted too, there was no doubt; but when people feel themselves in the right, what need is there of ruffling feathers and being saucy?

And the Robin did honestly feel himself in the right; but, oh! how hard it is to resist the influence of evil suggestions, even when one knows them to be such, and turns aside from them. They are so apt to steal back into the heart unawares and undermine the principle that seemed so steady before. To a certain extent, this was the case with our poor little friend; and those who are disposed to judge harshly of his weakness, must remember that he was very young, and could not be expected to go on right always without a mistake.

Certain it is that he drooped awhile in spirits, as the winter advanced. He sang every day, it is true, and would still have maintained his own opinions

against any one who should have opposed them ; but he was decidedly disturbed in mind, and thought sadly too much, for his own peace and comfort, of what both the Tortoise and Blackbird had said.

The colder the days became, the more he became depressed ; not that there was any cold then that he really cared about, but he was fidgetting about the much greater cold which he had been told was coming ; and, as he hopped about on the grass round the fountain, picking up worms and food, he was ready to drop a tear out of his bright black eye at the thought of the days when the ground was to be so hard that the worms could not come out, or his beak reach them.

Had this state of things gone on long, the Robin would have begun to wish to go to sleep, like the Tortoise ; and no more singing would have been heard in the plantation of the suburban villa that year.

But Robins are brave-hearted little fellows, as well as bold and saucy ; and one bright day our friend bethought himself that he would go and talk the matter over with an old Woodlark, who he had heard frequented a thicket at a considerable distance off.

On his way thither, he heard several larks singing high up in the sky over the fields ; and by the time he reached the thicket he was in excellent spirits himself, and seemed to have left all his megrims behind.

It was fortunate such was the case, for when, as he approached the thicket, he heard the Woodlark's note, it was so plaintive and low that it would have

made anybody cry to listen to it. And when the Robin congratulated him on his singing, the Woodlark did not seem to care much for the compliment, but confided to his new acquaintance, that although he thought it right to sing and be thankful, as long as there was a bit of comfort left, he was not so happy as he seemed to be, since in reality he was always expecting to die some day of having nothing at all to eat.

"For," said he, "when the snow is on the ground, it is a perfect chance if one finds a morsel of food all day long."

"But I thought you had lived here several seasons," suggested the Robin, who in his braced condition of mind was getting quite reasonable again.

"So I have," murmured the Woodlark, heaving his breast with a touching sigh.

"And you did not die of having nothing to eat, last winter?" observed the Robin.

"It appears not," ejaculated the Woodlark, as gravely as possible, and with another sigh; whereat the Robin's eye actually twinkled with mirth, for he had a good deal of fun in his composition, and could not but smile to himself at the Woodlark's solemn way of admitting that he was alive.

"Nor the winter before?" asked he.

"No," murmured the Woodlark again.

"Nor the winter before that?" persisted the saucy Robin.

"Well, no; of course not," answered the Wood-

lark, somewhat impatiently, "because I am here, as you see."

"Then how did you manage when the snow came, and there was no food?" inquired the Robin.

"I never told you there was actually *no* food in those other winters," answered the Woodlark, somewhat peevishly, for he did not want to be disturbed in his views. "Little bits of things did accidentally turn up always. But that is no proof that it will ever happen again. It was merely chance!"

"Ah, my venerable friend," cried the Robin; "have you no confidence in the kind chance that has befriended you so often before?"

"I can never be sure that it will do so again," murmured the Woodlark, despondingly.

"But when that kind chance brings you one comfortable day after another, why should you sadden them all by these fears for by-and-by?"

"It is a weakness, I believe," responded the Woodlark. "I will see what I can do towards enjoying myself more. You are very wise, little Robin; and it is a wisdom that will keep you happy all the year round."

Here the Woodlark rose into the air, and performed several circling flights, singing vigorously all the time. The old melancholy pervaded the tone, but that might be mere habit. The song was, at any rate, more earnest and strong.

"That is better already," cried the Robin, gaily; "and for my part, if I am ever disposed to be dull myself, I shall think of what you told me just now of

all the past winters ; namely, that *little bits of things did always accidentally turn up*. What a comforting fact ! ”

“ To think of my ever having been able to comfort anybody ! ” exclaimed the Woodlark. “ I must try to take comfort myself.”

“ Ay, indeed,” cried the Robin, earnestly ; “ it is faithless work to give advice which you will not follow yourself.”

So saying, the Robin trilled out a pleasant farewell, and returned to the shrubby grounds, where, in an ivy-covered wall, he had found for himself a snug little winter’s home.

It was during the ensuing week, and while the Robin was in his blithest mood, and singing away undisturbed by megrims of any kind, but rejoicing in the comforts of each day as it came, that the Tortoise once more accosted him.

When Robin first heard his voice, he was startled, and feared another scolding, but he was quite mistaken. The old Tortoise was sitting by the side of an opening in the ground, which he had scratched out very cleverly with his claws. It was in a corner among some stones which had lain there for years ; and one large one in particular overhung the entrance of the hole he had dug. The wind had drifted a vast quantity of leaves in that direction, and some of them had been blown even into the hole itself, so that it looked like a warm underground bed.

“ Hop down to me, little bird ! ” was the Tortoise’s address, in a quite friendly voice ; an order with

which the Robin at once complied. "Ah, you need not be afraid," continued he, as the Robin alighted by his side. "I am quite happy now. See what a comfortable place I have made myself here in the earth. There, there, put your head in and peep. Did you ever see anything so snug in your life?"

The Robin peered in with his sharp little eye, and really admired the Tortoise's ingenious labour very much.

"Hop in," cried the Tortoise gaily; "there's room enough and to spare, is there not?"

Robin hopped in, and looked round. He was surprised at the size and convenience of the place, and admitted that a more roomy and comfortable winter's bed could not be wished for.

"Who wouldn't go to sleep?" cried the Tortoise; "what say you, my little friend? But you need not say; I see it in your eye. You are not for sleep yourself. Well, well, we have all our different ways of life, and yours is a pleasant folly, after all, when it doesn't disturb other people. And you won't disturb me any more this year, for I have made my arrangements at last, and shall soon be so sound asleep, that I shall hear no more of your singing for the present. It's a nice bed, eh? isn't it? Not so nice, perhaps, as the warm sands of my native land; but the ground, even here, is much warmer inside than people think, who know nothing of it but the cold damp surface. Ah, if it wasn't, how would the snowdrop and crocus live through the winter? Well, I called you here to say good-bye, and show you where I am, and to ask

you to remember me in the Spring ; if—that is, of course,—you survive the terrible weather that is coming. You don't mind my having been somewhat cross the other day, do you ? I am apt to get testy now and then, and you disturbed me in my nap, which nobody can bear. But you will forgive and forget, won't you, little bird ? ”

The kind-hearted Robin protested his affectionate feeling in a thousand pretty ways.

“ Then you won't forget me in the Spring,” added the Tortoise ; “ but come here and sit on the laurel-bush, and sing me awake. Not till the days are mild, and the plants get juicy, of course, but as soon as you please then. And now, good-bye. There's a strange feeling in the air to-day, and before many hours are over there will be snow and frost. Yours is a pleasant folly. I wish it may not cost you dear. Good-bye.”

Hereupon the old Tortoise huddled away into the interior of his hole, where he actually disappeared from sight ; and as, soon afterwards, the drifting leaves completely choked up the entrance of the place, no one could have suspected what was there but those who knew the secret beforehand. He had been right in his prognostication of the weather. A thick, gloomy, raw evening was succeeded by a bitterly cold night, and towards the morning the over-weighted clouds began to discharge themselves of some of their snow ; and as the day wore, the flakes got heavier and heavier and heavier ; and as no sunshine came out to melt them, and a biting frost set in, the country was soon covered with a winding-sheet

of white. And now, indeed, began a severe trial of the Robin's patience and hope. It is easy to boast while the sun still shines, if ever so little ; but it is not till the storm comes that the mettle of principle is known.

" There are berries left yet," said he, with cheerful composure, as he went out to seek for food, and found a holly-tree by the little gate of the plantation, red with its beautiful fruit. And, after he had eaten, he poured out a song of joy and thankfulness into the cold wintry sky, and finally retreated under his ivy-bush at night, happy and contented as before.

But that terrible storm lasted for weeks without intermission ; or, if it did intermit, it was but to a partial thaw, which the night frost soon bound up again, as firmly, or more firmly, than ever.

Many other birds beside himself came to the holly-tree for berries, and it was wonderful how they disappeared, first from one branch, and then from another : but still the Robin sang on. He poured out his little song of thanks after every meal. That was his rule. Other birds would jeer at him sometimes, but he could not be much moved by jeers. He had brought his bravery, and his patience, and his hope into the field against whatever troubles might arise, and a few foolish jests would not trouble a spirit so strung up to cheerful endurance.

" I will sing the old Tortoise awake yet," said he, many and many a time, when, after chanting his little thanksgiving in the holly-tree, he would hover about the spot where his friend lay asleep in the ground, and think of the Spring that would one day

come, bringing its mild days and its juicy plants, and its thousand pleasant delights.

I do not say, but that it was a great trial to our friend, when, after dreaming all these things in his day-dreams, he was roused up at last by feeling himself unusually cold and stiff ; and was forced to hurry to his ivy home to recover himself at all.

The alternations, too, of winter are very trying. The long storm of many weeks ceased at last, and a fortnight of open weather ensued, which, although wet and cold, gave much more liberty to the birds, and allowed of greater plenty of food. The Robin could now hop once more on the grass round the fountain, and get a few worms, and pick up a few seeds. And he was so delighted with the change, that he half hoped the winter was over ; and he sat in a laurel-tree by the Tortoise's cave, and poured out long ditties of anticipative delight. But the bitterest storm of all was yet in store,—the storm of disappointed hope.

Oh, heavy clouds, why did you hang so darkly over the earth just before the Christmas season ? Oh, why did the fields become so white again, and the trees so laden with snow-wreaths, and the waters so frozen and immoveable, just when all human beings wanted to rejoice and be glad ? Did you come—perhaps you did !—to rouse to tender pity and compassionate love, the hearts of all who wished to welcome their Saviour with hosannas of joy ? but who cannot forget, if they read the gospel of love, that whosoever does a kindness to one of the least of His disciples, does it unto Him. Surely, thus may the

bitter cold, and the trying weather of a biting snowy Christmas, be read. Surely, it calls aloud to every one, that *now* is the moment for clothing the naked, for feeding the hungry, and for comforting the afflicted.

Heavily, heavily, heavily, it came down. There were two days in which the Robin never left his ivy-covered hole, but hunger took him at last to the holly-tree by the little gate. Its prickly leaves were loaded with snow, and on one side the stem could not be seen at all. Was it his fancy, or was the tree really much less than before? He hopped from one white branch to another, and fancied that large pieces were gone. He peered under and over, picked at the leaves, and shook down little morsels of snow; but nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, could a single berry be found!

The Robin flew about in distress, and in so doing caught sight of a heap of holly, laurel, and bay branches that were laid aside together to be carried up to the house to decorate its walls. He picked two or three of the berries from them as they lay there,—ripe, red berries, such as he had gathered but lately from the tree; and then came the gardener by, who carried the whole away. He flew after the man as he walked, and never left him until he disappeared with his load into the house. Its unfriendly doors closed against the little wanderer, and no one within knew of the wistful eyes which had watched the coveted food out of sight.

“I have eaten; let me be thankful,” was the Robin’s resolute remark, as he flew away from the house and returned to the holly-tree, which had so

lately been his storehouse of hope, and from its now stripped and barren branches, poured out, as before, his lay of glad thanksgiving for what he had had.

Not a breath of wind was blowing, not a leaf stirred ; not a movement of any kind took place, save when some overloaded branch dropped part of its weight of snow on the ground below ; as the sweet carol of the still hungry little bird rose through the air on that dark, still, winter's afternoon.

What did it tell of ? Oh, surely, that clear bell-like melody, that musical tone, that exquisite harmonious trill, told of something,—of something, I mean, besides the tale of a poor little desolate bird, whose food had been snatched away before his eyes, and who might be thought to have eaten his last meal.

Surely, those solitary notes of joy, poured into the midst of a gloom so profound, were as an angel's message, coming with a promise of peace and hope, at a moment when both seemed dead and departed.

Homeward, from his day's work of business there passed by, at that moment, the owner and inhabitant of the little suburban villa. It had been a melancholy day to him, for it was saddened by painful recollections. It was the anniversary of the day on which his wife had been laid in her churchyard grave, and since that event two sons had sailed for the far-off land of promise, which puts a hemisphere between the loved and loving on earth. So that far-distant land held them, whilst one—not so distant, perhaps, but more unattainable for the present—held the other. No wonder, therefore, that on the owner's

face, as he approached his home, there hung a cloud of suffering and care, which not even the thought of the Christmas Day at hand, and the children yet spared to his hearth, could prevent or dispel.

Verily the autumn of man's life comes down upon him as the autumn season descends upon the earth. Clouds and tears mixed with whatever brightness may remain.

All at once, however, the abstracted look of sorrow is startled. What is it that he hears? He is passing outside the little plantation which skirts the grounds. He is close to the little gate near which the holly-tree grows. He pauses,—he stops,—he lifts up those troubled eyes. Surely, a wholesome tear is stealing over the cheek. Beautiful, tender, affecting, as the voice of the cuckoo in spring, there swept over the listener's heart, the autumnal song of the Robin. Sing on, sing on, from the top of your desolate tree, oh little bird of cheerfulness and hope! Pour out again that heaven-taught music of contentment with the hour that now is. Shalt *thou* be confident of protection, and *man* destitute of hope? Shalt *thou*, in the depth of thy winter's trial, have joy and peace, and *man* never look beyond the cloud?

Poor little innocent bird, he sang his pretty song to an end, and then he flew away. Quarrel not with him, if in painful recollection of the holly-berries that had been carried into the house, he hovered round its windows and doors, with anxious and curious stealth. Whether across the middle of one window he observed a tempting red cluster hanging down inside, no one can say. But the tantalising pain of such a sight, if

he felt it, was soon over, for just then the window was opened, and along its outside ledge something was strewn by a careful hand. The window was closed again immediately and whoever it was within retreated backwards into the room.

From a standard rose-bush, whither he had flown, when the window was opened, our little friend watched the affair.

Presently a fragrant odour seemed to steal towards him,—something unknown yet pleasant, something tempting and very nice. Was there any risk to be feared? All seemed quiet and still. Should he venture? Ah, that odour again! it was irresistible.

In another minute he was on the ledge, and boldly, as if a dozen invitations had bidden him welcome to the feast, he was devouring crumb after crumb of the scattered bread.

A burst of delighted laughter from within broke upon his elysium of joy for a moment, and sent him back with sudden flight to the rose-bush. But no disaster ensued, and he was tempted again and again.

The children within might well laugh at the saucy bird, whom their father had, by his gift of bread-crumbs, tempted to the place. They laughed at the bold hop,—the eager pecking,—the brilliant bead-like eye of their new guest,—and at the bright red of his breast; but it was a laugh that told of nothing but kind delight.

“Little bits of things do accidentally turn up always, indeed!” said the Robin to himself, as he crept into his ivy hole that evening to sleep; and he

dreamt half the night of the wonderful place and the princely fare. And next morning, long before anybody was awake and up, he was off to the magical window-ledge again, but neither children nor bread-crumbs were there :—(how was he to know without experience about breakfast hours, and the customs of social life ?) So it almost seemed to him as if his evening's meal had been a dream, too good a thing to be true, or if it had ever been true, too good to return. Yet a sweeter song was never heard under a summer sun, than that with which the Robin greeted that early day, the Christmas morning of the year.

Perched in the laurel-bush near the Tortoise's retreat, he told his sleeping friend a long, marvellous tale of his yesterday's adventures, and promised him more news against the time when he should return to wake him up in the Spring.

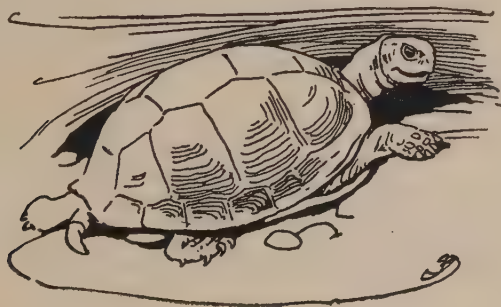
Nor did he promise in vain ; for whether the Tortoise would be patient enough to listen or not, there was no doubt the Robin had soon plenty to tell. He had to tell, not only of the meal that was spread for him in due time that very Christmas day, by those suddenly raised up friends—but of the daily meal that henceforth never failed ; of the curious tiny house that was erected for him at the end of the ledge, which, carpeted as it was with cotton wool and hay, formed almost *too* warm a roosting place for his hardy little frame.

But even to the Tortoise he could never tell all he had felt during that wonderful winter ; for he could never explain to any one the mysterious friendship

which grew up between himself and his protectors. He could never describe properly the friendly faces that sat round the breakfast table on which at last he was allowed to hop about at will.

He told, however, how he used to sing on the rose-tree outside, every morning of every day, to welcome the waking of his friends, and how, in the late afternoons, the father would sometimes open the window, and sit there alone by himself, listening to his song.

"Come, come, my little friend," remarked the Tortoise, when he did awake at last, and had come out of his cavern-bed, and heard the account; "I have been asleep for a long time, and I dare say have been dreaming all manner of fine things myself, if I could but think of them. Now, I suspect you have had a nap as well. However, I am very glad to see you alive, and not so half-starved looking as I expected. But as to your having sung every day, and had plenty to eat every day, and been so happy all the time,—take my advice, don't try to cram older heads than your own with travellers' tales!"



SEE-SAW

“Turning to scorn with lips divine
The falsehood of extremes.”—TENNYSON.

THE felled oak in the corner of the timber-yard lay groaning under the plank, which a party of children had thrown across him to play see-saw upon.

Not that the plank was so heavy even with two or three little ones sitting on each end, nor that the oak was too weak to hold it up—though, of course, the pressure was pretty strong just at the centre, where the plank balanced. But it was such a use to be put to !

The other half of the tree had been cut into beautiful even planks, some time before, but this was the root end, and his time had not yet come, and he was getting impatient.

“Here we go up, up, up !” cried the children, as the plank rose into the sky on one side. “I shall catch the tree-tops—no ! the church-steeple—no ! the stars.”

Or, “Here we go down, down, down !” cried the others. “Safe and snug on the ground—no ! right through the world—no ! out at the other side. Ah ! steady there, stupid old stump !”

This was because the plank had swerved, not the tree.



"HERE WE GO, UP, UP, UP," CRIED THE CHILDREN.

And so the game went on ; for the ups and downs came in turns, and the children shrieked with delight, and the poor tree groaned loudly all the time.

“ And I am to sit here ; and bear not only their weight but their blame, and be called stupid and be told to keep steady, when it is they who are giddy and can’t be depended upon ; and to be contented, while they do nothing but play pranks and enjoy themselves,” said he ; but he said it to himself, for he did not know which to complain to—the children or the plank. As he groaned, however, he thought of the time when he was king of the little wood, where he had grown up from the acorn days of his babyhood, and it broke his heart to be so insignificant now.

“ Why have they not cut me into planks like the rest ? ” continued he, angrily. “ I might have led the see-saw myself then, as this fellow does, who leans so heavily on my back, without a thought that I am as good or better than himself. Why have they not given me the chance of enjoying myself like these others—up in the sky at one end, down on the ground at the other, full of energy and life ? The whole timber-yard, but myself, has a chance. Position and honour, as well as pleasure, are for everybody except me. But I am to stick in a corner merely for others to steady themselves upon—unthought-of or despised, made a tool of—merely that.—Miserable me ! ”

Now this groaning was so dreadful, it woke the large garden snail in the grass hard by, whose custom

it was to come out from his haunt under the timber-yard wall every morning at sunrise, and crawl round and round the felled oak, to see the world come to life, leaving a slimy track behind him on the bark wherever he moved. It was his constitutional stroll, and he had continued it all the season, pursuing his morning reflections without interruption, and taking his nap in the grass afterwards, as regularly as the days came round.

But napping through such lamentation was impossible, and accordingly he once more began to crawl up the side of the felled oak, his head turning now to one side, now to the other, his horns extended to the utmost, that, if possible, he might see what was the matter.

But he could not make out, though he kept all his eyes open, in the strict sense of the words: so by-and-bye he made the inquiry of his old friend the tree.

"What is the matter, do you ask?" groaned the oak more heavily than ever—"you who can change your position and act independently when you wish; you who are *not* left a useless log as I am, the scorn and sport of my own kith and kin? Yes, the very planks who balance themselves on my body, and mock me by their activity, have probably come from my own bosom, and once hung on me as branches, drinking in life from the life I gave. Oh miserable me! miserable, despised, useless!"

Now there may be plenty of animals to be found with more brilliant abilities and livelier imagination

than the snail, but for gravity of demeanour and calmness of nerve who is his equal ? and if a sound judgment be not behind such outward signs, there is no faith to be put in faces !

Accordingly, Sir Helix Hortensis—so let us call him—made no answer at first to the wailings of the oak. Three times he crawled round it, leaving three fresh traces of his transit, before he spoke, his horns turning hither and thither as those wonderful eyes at the end strove to take in the full state of the case. And his are not the eyes, you know, which waste their energies in scatterbrained staring. He keeps them cool in their cases till there is something to be looked at, and then turns them inside out to do their destined work.

And thus he looked, and he looked, and he looked, while the children went on shouting, and the plank went on see-sawing, and the tree went on groaning ; and as he looked, he considered.

“ Have you anything to say ? ” at last inquired the oak, who had long experience of Sir Helix’s wisdom.

“ I have,” answered the snail. “ You don’t know your own value, that’s all.”

“ Ask the see-sawers my value ! ” exclaimed the prostrate tree, bitterly. “ One up at the stars, another beyond the world ! What am *I* doing meanwhile ? ”

“ Holding them both up, which is more than they can do for themselves,” muttered the snail, turning round to go back to the grass.

"But—but—stop a moment, dear Sir Helix ; the see-sawers don't think that," argued the tree.

"They're all light-minded together, and don't think," sneered the snail. "Up in the sky one minute, down in the dust the next. Never you mind that. Everybody can't play at high jinks with comfort, luckily for the rest of the world. Sit fast, do your duty, and have faith. While they are going flightily up and down, your steady balance is the saving of both."



NOT LOST, BUT GONE BEFORE

“ — Will none of you, in pity
 To those you left behind, disclose the secret ? ”
 BLAIR’S “ *Grave.* ”

“ I WONDER what becomes of the Frog, when he climbs up out of this world, and disappears, so that we do not see even his shadow ; till, plop ! he is among us again, when we least expect him. Does anybody know where he goes to ? Tell me, somebody, pray ! ”

Thus chattered the grub of a Dragon-fly, as he darted about with his numerous companions, in and out among the plants at the bottom of the water, in search of prey.

The water formed a beautiful pond in the centre of a wood. Stately trees grew around it and reflected themselves on its surface, as on a polished mirror ; and the bulrushes and forget-me-nots which fringed its sides seemed to have a twofold life, so perfect was their image below.

“ Who cares what the Frog does ? ” answered one of those who overheard the Grub’s inquiry ; “ what is it to us ? ”

“ Look out for food for yourself,” cried another, “ and let other people’s business alone.”

“ But I have a curiosity on the subject,” expostu-

lated the first speaker. "I can see all of you when you pass by me among the plants in the water here; and when I don't see you any longer, I know you have gone further on. But I followed a Frog just now as he went upwards, and all at once he went to the side of the water, and then began to disappear, and presently he was gone. Did he leave this world, do you think? And what can there be beyond?"

"You idle, talkative fellow," cried another, shooting by as he spoke, "attend to the world you are in, and leave the 'beyond,' if there is a 'beyond,' to those that are there. See what a morsel you have missed with your wonderings about nothing." So saying, the saucy speaker seized an insect which was flitting right in front of his friend.

The curiosity of the Grub was a little checked by these and similar remarks, and he resumed his employment of chasing prey for a time.

But, do what he would, he could not help thinking of the curious disappearance of the Frog, and presently began to tease his neighbours about it again, *What becomes of the Frog when he leaves this world?* being the burden of his inquiry.

The minnows eyed him askance and passed on without speaking, for they knew no more than he did of the matter, and yet were loth to proclaim their ignorance; and the eels wriggled away in the mud out of hearing, for they could not bear to be disturbed.

The Grub got impatient, but he succeeded in inspiring several of his tribe with some of his own curiosity, and then went scrambling about in all

directions with his followers, asking the same unreasonable questions of all the creatures he met.

Suddenly there was a heavy splash in the water, and a large yellow Frog swam down to the bottom among the grubs.

"Ask the Frog himself," suggested a Minnow, as he darted by overhead, with a mischievous glance of his eye. And very good advice it seemed to be, only the thing was much easier said than done. For the Frog was a dignified sort of personage, of whom the smaller inhabitants of the water stood a great deal in awe. It required no common amount of assurance to ask a creature of his standing and gravity, where he had been to, and where he had come from. He might justly consider such an inquiry as a very impertinent piece of curiosity.

Still, such a chance of satisfying himself was not to be lost, and after taking two or three turns round the roots of a water lily, the Grub screwed up his courage, and approaching the Frog in the meekest manner he could assume, he asked—

"Is it permitted to a very unhappy creature to speak?"

The Frog turned his gold-edged eyes upon him in surprise and answered—

"Very unhappy creatures had better be silent. I never talk but when I am happy."

"But *I* shall be happy if I may talk," interposed the Grub, as glibly as possible.

"Talk away, then," cried the Frog; "what can it matter to me?"

"Respected Frog," replied the Grub, "but it is something I want to ask you."

"Ask away," exclaimed the Frog, not in a very encouraging tone, it must be confessed; but still the permission was given.

"What is there beyond the world?" inquired the Grub, in a voice scarcely audible from emotion.

"What world do you mean?" cried the Frog, rolling his goggle eyes round and round.

"This world, of course;—our world," answered the Grub.

"This pond, you mean," remarked the Frog, with a contemptuous sneer.

"I mean the place we live in, whatever you may choose to call it," cried the Grub pertly. "*I* call it the world."

"Do you, sharp little fellow?" rejoined the Frog. "Then what is the place you don't live in, the 'beyond' the world, eh?"

And the Frog shook his sides with merriment as he spoke.

"That is just what I want you to tell me," replied the Grub briskly.

"Oh, indeed, little one!" exclaimed Froggy, rolling his eyes this time with an amused twinkle. "Come, I shall tell you then. It is dry land."

There was a pause of several seconds, and then, "Can one swim about there?" inquired the Grub, in a subdued tone.

"I should think not," chuckled the Frog. "Dry land is not water, little fellow. That is just what it is *not*."

"But I want you to tell me what it is," persisted the Grub.

"Of all the inquisitive creatures I ever met, you certainly are the most troublesome," cried the Frog. "Well, then, dry land is something like the sludge at the bottom of this pond, only it is not wet, because there is no water."

"Really!" interrupted the Grub, "what is there then?"

"That's the difficulty," exclaimed Froggy. "There is something, of course, and they call it air; but how to explain it I don't know. My own feeling about it is, that it's the nearest approach to nothing possible. Do you comprehend?"

"Not quite," replied the Grub, hesitating.

"Exactly; I was afraid not. Now just take my advice, and ask no more silly questions. No good can possibly come of it," urged the Frog.

"Honoured Frog," exclaimed the Grub, "I must differ from you there. Great good will, as I think, come of it, if my restless curiosity can be stilled by obtaining the knowledge I seek. If I learn to be contented where I am, it will be something. At present I am miserable and restless under my ignorance."

"You are a very silly fellow," cried the Frog, "who will not be satisfied with the experience of others. I tell you the thing is not worth your troubling yourself about. But, as I rather admire your spirit, (which, for so insignificant a creature, is astonishing,) I will make you an offer. If you choose

to take a seat on my back, I will carry you up to dry land myself, and then you can judge for yourself what there is there, and how you like it. I consider it a foolish experiment, mind, but that is your own look out. I make my offer, to give you pleasure."

"And I accept it with a gratitude that knows no bounds," exclaimed the enthusiastic Grub.

"Drop yourself down on my back, then, and cling to me as well as you can. For, remember, if you go gliding off, you will be out of the way when I leave the water."

The Grub obeyed, and the Frog, swimming gently upwards, reached the bulrushes by the water's side.

"Hold fast," cried he, all at once, and then, raising his head out of the pond, he clambered up the bank, and got upon the grass.

"Now, then, here we are," exclaimed he. "What do you think of dry land?"

But no one spoke in reply.

"Halloo! gone?" he continued; "that's just what I was afraid of. He has floated off my back, stupid fellow, I declare. Dear, dear, how unlucky! but it cannot be helped. And, perhaps, he may make his way to the water's edge here, after all, and then I can help him out. I will wait about and see."

And away went Froggy, with an occasional jaunty leap, along the grass by the edge of the pond, glancing every now and then among the bulrushes, to see if he could spy the dark, mailed figure of the Dragon-fly Grub.

But the Grub, meanwhile? Ah, so far from having

floated off the Frog's back through carelessness, he had clung to it with all the tenacity of hope, and the moment came when the mask of his face began to issue from the water.

But the same moment sent him reeling from his resting-place into the pond, panting and struggling for life. A shock seemed to have struck his frame, a deadly faintness succeeded, and it was several seconds before he could recover himself.

"Horrible!" cried he, as soon as he had rallied a little. "Beyond this world there is nothing but death. The Frog has deceived me. He cannot go *there*, at any rate."

And with these words, the Grub moved away to his old occupations; his ardour for inquiry grievously checked, though his spirit was unsubdued.

He contented himself for the present, therefore, with talking over what he had done, and where he had been, with his friends. And who could listen unmoved to such a recital? The novelty, the mystery, the danger, the all but fatal result, and the still unexplained wonder of what became of the Frog,—all invested the affair with a romantic interest, and the Grub had soon a host of followers of his own race, questioning, chattering, and conjecturing, at his heels.

By this time the day was declining, and the active pursuit of prey was gradually becoming suspended for a time; when, as the inquisitive Grub was returning from a somewhat protracted ramble among the water-plants, he suddenly encountered, sitting pen-

sively on a stone at the bottom of the pond, his friend the yellow Frog.

"You here!" cried the startled Grub; "you never left this world at all then, I suppose. What a deception you must have practised upon me! But this comes of trusting to strangers, as I was foolish enough to do."

"You perplex me by your offensive remarks," replied the Frog, gravely. "Nevertheless, I forgive you, because you are so clumsy and ignorant, that civility cannot reasonably be expected from you, little fellow. It never struck you, I suppose, to think what *my* sensations were, when I landed this morning on the grass, and discovered that you were no longer on my back. Why did you not sit fast as I told you? But this is always the way with you foolish fellows, who think you can fathom and investigate everything. You are thrown over by the first practical difficulty you meet."

"Your accusations are full of injustice," exclaimed the indignant Grub.

It was clear they were on the point of quarrelling, and would certainly have done so, had not the Frog, with unusual magnanimity, desired the Grub to tell his own story, and clear himself from the charge of clumsiness if he could.

It was soon told; the Frog staring at him in silence out of those great goggle eyes, while he went through the details of his terrible adventure.

"And now," said the Grub, in conclusion, "as it is clear that there is nothing beyond this world but

death, all your stories of going there yourself must be mere inventions. Of course, therefore, if you do leave this world at all, you go to some other place you are unwilling to tell me of. You have a right to your secret, I admit ; but as I have no wish to be fooled by any more travellers' tales, I will bid you a very good evening."

" You will do no such thing, till you have listened as patiently to my story as I have done to yours," exclaimed the Frog.

" That is but just, I allow," said the Grub, and stopped to listen.

Then the Frog told how he had lingered by the edge of the pond, in the vain hope of his approach, how he had hopped about in the grass, how he had peeped among the bulrushes. " And at last," continued he, " though I did not see you yourself, I saw a sight which has more interest for you, than for any other creature that lives," and there he paused.

" And that was ? " asked the inquisitive Grub, his curiosity reviving, and his wrath becoming appeased.

" Up the polished green stalk of one of those bulrushes," continued the Frog, " I beheld one of your race slowly and gradually climbing, till he had left the water behind him, and was clinging firmly to his chosen support, exposed to the full glare of the sun. Rather wondering at such a sight, considering the fondness you all of you show for the shady bottom of the pond, I continued to gaze, and observed presently,—but I cannot tell you in what way the thing

happened,—that a rent seemed to come in your friend's body, and by degrees, gradually and after many struggles, there emerged from it one of those radiant creatures who float through the air I spoke to you of, and dazzle the eyes of all who catch glimpses of them as they pass,—a glorious Dragon-fly !

“ As if scarcely awakened from some perplexing dream, he lifted his wings out of the carcase he was forsaking ; and though shrivelled and damp at first, they stretched and expanded in the sunshine, till they glistened as if with fire.

“ How long the strange process continued, I can scarcely tell, so fixed was I in astonishment and admiration ; but I saw the beautiful creature at last poise himself for a second or two in the air before he took flight. I saw the four gauzy pinions flash back the sunshine that was poured on them. I heard the clash with which they struck upon the air ; and I beheld his body give out rays of glittering blue and green as he darted along, and away, away, over the water in eddying circles that seemed to know no end. Then I plunged below to seek you out, rejoicing for your sake in the news I brought.”

The Frog stopped short, and a long pause followed.

At last—“ It is a wonderful story,” observed the Grub, with less emotion than might have been expected.

“ A wonderful story, indeed,” repeated the Frog ; “ may I ask your opinion upon it ? ”

“ It is for me to defer mine to yours,” was the Grub's polite reply.

"Good ! you are grown obliging, my little friend," remarked the Frog. "Well then, I incline to the belief, that what I have seen accounts for your otherwise unreasonable curiosity, your tiresome craving for information about the world beyond your own."

"That were possible, always provided your account can be depended upon," mused the Grub, with a doubtful air.

"Little fellow," exclaimed the Frog, "remember that your distrust cannot injure me, but may deprive yourself of a comfort."

"And you really think, then, that the glorious creature you describe was once a——"

"Silence," cried the Frog ; "I am not prepared with definitions. Adieu ! the shades of night are falling on your world. I return to my grassy home on dry land. Go to rest, little fellow, and awake in hope."

The Frog swam close to the bank, and clambered up its sides, while the Grub returned to his tribe, who rested during the hours of darkness from their life of activity and pursuit.

* * * *

"Promise !" uttered an entreating voice.

"I promise," was the earnest answer.

"Faithfully ? " urged the first speaker.

"Solemnly," ejaculated the second.

But the voice was languid and weak, for the Dragon-fly Grub was sick and uneasy. His limbs had lost their old activity, and a strange oppression was upon him.

The creatures whom he had been accustomed to chase passed by him unharmed ; the water-plants over which he used to scramble with so much agility were distasteful to his feet ; nay, the very water itself into which he had been born, and through which he was wont to propel himself with so much ingenuity, felt suffocating in its weight.

Upwards he must go now, upwards, upwards ! That was the strong sensation which mastered every other, and to it he felt he must submit, as to some inevitable law. And then he thought of the Frog's account, and felt a trembling conviction that the time had come when the riddle of his own fate must be solved.

His friends and relations were gathered around him, some of his own age, some a generation younger, who had only that year entered upon existence. All of them were followers and adherents, whom he had inspired with his own enthusiastic hopes ; and they would fain have helped him, if they could, in this his hour of weakness. But there was no help for him now but hope, and of that he possessed, perhaps, even more than they did.

Then came an earnest request, and then a solemn promise, that, as surely as the great hopes proved true, so surely would he return and tell them so.

" But, oh ! if you should forget ! " exclaimed one of the younger generation, timid and uneasy.

" Forget the old home, my friend ? " ejaculated the sick Grub, " forget our life of enjoyment here, the ardour of the chase, the ingenious stratagems, the

triumph of success? Forget the emotions of hope and fear we have shared together, and which I am bound, if I can, to relieve? Impossible!"

"But if you should not be able to come back to us," suggested another.

"More unlikely still," murmured the half-exhausted Grub. "To a condition so exalted as the one in store for us, what can be impossible? Adieu, my friends, adieu! I can tarry here no longer. Ere long you may expect to see me again in a new and more glorious form. Till then, farewell!"

Languid, indeed, was the voice, and languid were the movements of the Grub, as he rose upwards through the water to the reeds and bulrushes that fringed its bank. Two favourite brothers, and a few of his friends, more adventurous than the rest, accompanied him in his ascent, in the hope of witnessing whatever might take place above; but in this they were, of course, disappointed.

From the moment when, clinging with his feet to the stem of a bulrush, he emerged from his native element into the air, his companions saw him no more.

Eyes fitted only for the watery fluid were incapable of the upward glance and power of vision which would have enabled them to pierce beyond it; and the little *coterie* of discoverers descended, mortified and sorrowful, to the bed of the pond.

The sun was high in the heavens when the Dragonfly Grub parted from his friends, and they waited through the long hours of the day for his return; at

first, in joyful hope, then in tremulous anxiety, and, as the shades of evening began to deepen around, in a gloomy fear, that bordered at last on despair. "He has forgotten us," cried some. "A death from which he never can awake has overtaken him," said others. "He will return to us yet," maintained the few who clung to hope.

But in vain messenger after messenger shot upwards to the bulrushes, and to various parts of the pond, hoping to discover some trace of the lost one. All who went out returned back dispirited from the vain and weary search, and even the most sanguine began to grow sick at heart.

Night closed at last upon them, bringing a temporary suspension of grief; but the beams of the next rising sun, while it filled all nature beside with joy and hopefulness, awakened them, alas! to a sense of the bitterest disappointment, and a feeling of indignation at the deception which had been practised upon them.

"We did very well without thinking of such things," said they; "but to have hopes like those held out, and to be deceived after all,—it is more than we can be expected to bear in patience."

And bear it in patience they did not. With a fierceness which nothing could restrain, they hurried about in the destructive pursuit of prey, carrying a terrible vengeance in all directions.

And thus passed on the hours of the second day, and before night a sort of grim and savage silence was agreed upon among them, and they ceased to

bewail either the loss of him they had loved, or their own uncertain destiny.

But on the morning of the third day, one of the Grub's favourite brothers came sailing into the midst of a group who were just rousing up from rest, ready to recommence the daily business of their life.

There was an unnatural brilliancy about his eyes, which shone as they had never done before, and startled all who looked at them, so that even the least observant had their attention arrested as he spoke.

"My friends," said he, "I was, as you know, one of our lost relative's favourite brothers. I trusted him, as if he had been a second self, and would have pledged myself a thousand times for his word. Judge, then, what I have suffered from his promise remaining still unfulfilled. Alas ! that he has not yet returned to us ! "

The favourite brother paused, and a little set in a corner by themselves murmured out, "How could he ? The story about the other world is false."

"He has not returned to us," recommenced the favourite brother. "But, my friends, I feel that I am going to him, wherever that may be, either to that new life he spoke about, or to that death from which there is no return. Dear ones ! I go as he did, upwards, upwards, upwards ! An irresistible desire compels me to it ; but before I go, I renew to you—for myself and him—the solemn promise he once made to you. Should the great hopes be true, we will come back and tell you so, If I return not—

but rely on me ; my word is more to me than life. Adieu ! ”

The Grub rose upwards through the water followed by the last of the three brothers, and one or two of the younger ones ; but on reaching the brink of the pond, he seized on a plant of the forget-me-not, and clinging to its firm flower-stalk, clambered out of the water into the open air.

Those who accompanied him watched him as he left the water ; but, after that, they saw no more. The blank of his departure alone remained to them, and they sank down, sad and uneasy, to their home below.

As before, the hours of the day passed on, and not a trace of the departed one was seen. In vain they dwelt upon the consoling words he had spoken. The hope he had for a time reawakened died out with the declining sun, and many a voice was raised against his treachery and want of love. “ He is faithless,” said some. “ He forgets us, like his brother, in his new fortune,” cried others. “ The story of that other world is false,” muttered the little set in the corner by themselves. Only a very few murmured to each other, “ We will not despair.”

One thing alone was certain, he did not return ; and the disappointed crowds took refuge from the thought as before, in the fiercest rapine and excitement, scattering destruction around them wherever they moved.

Another day now elapsed, and then, in the early dawn following, the third and last brother crept

slowly to a half-sleepy knot of his more particular friends, and roused them up.

“ Look at my eyes,” said he ; “ has not a sudden change come over them ? They feel to me swelled and bursting, and yet I see with a clouded and imperfect vision. Doubtless it is with me now as it was with our dear ones before they left us. I am oppressed, like them. Like them, an invisible power is driving me upwards, as they were driven. Listen, then ; for on my parting words you may depend. Let the other world be what it will, gorgeous beyond all we can fancy of it, blissful beyond all we can hope of it, do not fear in me an altered or forgetful heart. I dare not promise more. Yet, if it be possible, I will return. But, remember, there may well be that other world, and yet we, in ours, may misjudge its nature. Farewell, never part with hope. With your fears I know you never can part now. Farewell ! ”

And he, too, went upwards, through the cool water to the plants that bordered its side ; and from the leaf of a golden king-cup he rose out of his native element into that aerial world, into which water-grub’s eye never yet could pierce.

His companions lingered awhile near the spot where he had disappeared, but neither sign nor sound came to them. Only the dreary sense of bereavement reminded them that he once had been.

Then followed the hours of vain expectation, the renewed disappointment, the cruel doubts, the hope that struggled with despair.

And after this, others went upwards in succession ;

for the time came to all when the lustrous eyes of the perfect creature shone through the masked face of the Grub, and he must needs pass forward to the fulfilment of his destiny.

But the result among those who were left was always the same. There were ever some that doubted and feared, ever some that disbelieved and ridiculed, ever some that hoped and looked forward.

Ah ! if they could but have known, poor things ! If those eyes, fitted for the narrow bounds of their water world, could have been endued with a power of vision into the purer element beyond, what a lifetime of anxiety would they not have been spared ! What ease, what rest would have been theirs !

But belief would, in that case, have been an irresistible necessity, and hope must have changed her name.

And the Dragon-fly, meanwhile, was he really faithless as they thought ? When he burst his prison-house by the water-side, and rose on glittering wings into the summer air, had he indeed no memory for the dear ones he had so lately left ? No tender concern for their griefs and fears ? No recollection of the promise he had made ?

Ah ! so far from it, he thought of them amidst the transports of his wildest flights, and returned ever and ever to the precincts of that world which had once been the only world to him. But in that region also a power was over him superior to his own, and to it his will must submit. To the world of waters he could never more return,

The least touch upon its surface, as he skimmed over it with the purpose of descent, brought on a deadly shock, like that which, as a water-grub, he had experienced from emerging into air, and his wings involuntarily bore him instantly back from the unnatural contact.

"Alas! for the promise made in ignorance and presumption, miserable Grub that I was," was his bitter, constantly-repeated cry.

And thus, divided and yet near, parted yet united by love, he hovered about the barrier that lay between them, never quite, perhaps, without a hope that some accident might bring his dear ones into sight.

Nor was his constancy long unrewarded, for as, after even his longest roamings, he never failed to return to the old spot, he was there to welcome the emancipated brother, who so soon followed him.

And often, after that, the breezy air by the forest pond would resound in the bright summer afternoons with the clashing of Dragon-flies' wings, as, now backwards, now forwards, now to one side, now to another, without turn or intermission, they darted over the crystal water, in the rapture of the new life.

It might be, on those occasions, that some fresh arrival of kindred from below added a keener joy to their already joyous existence. Sweet assuredly it was to each new-comer, when the riddle of his fate was solved, to find in the new region, not a strange

and friendless abode, but a home rich with the welcomes of those who had gone before.

Sweet also it was, and strange as sweet, to know that even while they had been trembling and fearing in their ignorant life below, gleams from the wings of those they lamented were dropping like star-rays on their home, reflected hither and thither from the sun that shone above. Oh ! if they could but have known !

* * * * *

Beautiful forest-pond, crowded with mysterious life, of whose secrets we know so little, who would not willingly linger by your banks for study and for thought ? There, where the beech-tree throws out her graceful arms, glorying in the loveliness that is reflected beneath. There, where in the nominal silence the innocent birds pour out their music of joy. There, where the blue forget-me-not tells its tale of old romance, and the long grasses bend over their pictured shadows. There, where the Dragon-flies still hover on the surface of the water, longing to reassure the hearts of the trembling race, who are still hoping and fearing below.



UNOPENED PARCELS

“ Judge not the play before the play is done.”

F. QUARLES.

PART I

OH, the charm of an unopened parcel ! and oh, for childhood's measureless faith in its contents ! I do not speak here, of course, of those dull packages which come to order, and have a “ goods bill ” as well as “ goods ” inside—so many pounds of tea, or so many cheeses or the like. But I am thinking of those delightful parcels—*love*-parcels, let us call them—of which no one has too many in his lifetime ; which come to us fresh from the kind hands that have both furnished and packed them. These are the “ Old Home Parcels ” of one's infancy, and are dear to children as a colonist's parcels are to him. For at the old home live all that are left of the older generation, and among them there is sure to be some one—a grandmother, an uncle, or an aunt—who knows the turns of each little heart in the distant younger household ; and has listened to all manner of small confidences about likes and dislikes, and what every child would do and have, if it but could.

So when papa shouts at the foot of the stairs, “ A parcel from the old home, dears ! ” the rush of ecstasy that follows is overpowering. No one can get down

the stairs half fast enough, and yet they keep chattering all the way as they run, and all at once, so that there is nobody left to listen but the nursemaid, who is following with the youngest in her arms ; and she, I am sure, would not allow she had heard a single word, through the hubbub of so many tongues. Nevertheless, they have talked to some purpose ; all being persuaded that the thing they most wish for in the world has come in that parcel ; only they probably change their minds as to *what* that particular thing is, at every turn of the staircase ; so that there would be some difficulty in discovering what they really expected by the time they get to the bottom. For, supposing the nursery to be high up in the house, and there to be four flights of stairs down to the drawing-room, each child would have guessed four different delightful things as part of the contents ; and when you come to think of a family of six or eight children, you must admit it must be a very big parcel to satisfy them all.

Not necessarily, however. There it stands, unopened, in the centre of the large round table, as the children enter the drawing-room with bated breath. Papa standing in front—for he always opened the parcels—mamma not far off, ready to unpack it when opened ; not a string touched yet, and the direction staring in the face of all who can read :

The Masters and Misses —,

Somewhere Villa,

Some County,

England.



PAPA STANDING IN FRONT, FOR HE ALWAYS OPENED THE PARCELS.

I call this a beautiful sight. Others may fancy that the children must be greedy or covetous because they fix their eyes so longingly on the unopened parcel, and handle it so carefully as they make a few vain efforts to act on the "waste not, want not" principle, by untying the knots of the string. But to me the recollection of the scene brings quite a different train of thought, and makes me wish, in the depths of my heart, that we grown-up people could retain childhood's reliance in unopened parcels. For look you how the matter always ended. Not once in a hundred times did any one of the children find inside the parcel any one of the four different things they most wished for in the world on the four different flights of stairs ; and yet not once in a hundred times did any one of them express dissatisfaction or feel it. No ; they took what actually came, as a thousand times better than anything they could possibly have thought of—as no doubt it was ; for besides knowing what the children fancied they should like, the grandmother, or whoever it might be, had a sort of witch-like insight as to what would amuse them longest and best. And this the children got to feel by degrees, and so always laid aside their fancies in favour of grandmamma's reality.

I, however, made the hundredth exception once in my life. For once I lost my faith, and you shall hear how.

The old home parcels contained heaps of lesser parcels inside ; each of which had its outside paper neatly tied round with string, and duly addressed

with the name, in full, of the child for whom it was intended ; and of these there were often two or three a-piece. On one occasion a great many other parcels had been taken out before one came for me. At last my mother, who, as I said before, always managed the unpacking, called out in a clear voice, " ' Miss Honoria Eleanor ——.' Here, Honor dear, this is for you."

It was a small, roundish little packet, and I took it to a stool by the fire, and sat down to open and enjoy it. Then I broke the seal, unfastened the string, and removed the paper from—a common walnut ! unless my eyes deceived me. I had waited some time for my turn, and now, for once in my life on such an occasion, was disappointed. I did not speak, however ; but a silence so unusual—we all being in the habit of shouting over our gifts, much as lions roar over their food—attracted my father's attention, who, seated in his chair, on the other side of the rug, was reading the newspaper. He looked over the top of this now, and asked, " Honor, what is it ? "

" Only a walnut, papa," said I, as indifferently as I could, though ready to cry all the time. " You may have it, if you like," I added, crossing the rug, and offering it to him. " I will go and fetch the crackers."

You see, I wanted to get out of the room, for then, at any rate, I could have cried or stamped a little without being observed. But my father, who had dropped his newspaper when he took the walnut from my hand, now laid hold of me round the waist

with the other arm, and drew me towards him. I felt to dread being looked at, but my father would look. Nay, he set me right before him, and gazed full into my eyes. It was too much. They filled at once with tears, and I felt my lips trembling with distress.

Still my father only smiled. "Little Honor," said he, in a whisper, "you are too impatient. You have not half opened your parcel yet."

The paper in which the walnut had been wrapped was lying on the floor. I picked it up and held it before him inside and out, to show him his mistake. I should have said, "I *have* opened it quite, papa," if I had been able to speak at all.

"Oh, nonsense!" papa went on, but still with a smile; "that's only the outside paper, child! Listen, little Honor, *your parcel is still unopened*—do you hear? Take it back; look at it for yourself."

I took it from his hand and sat down, and I turned the walnut round and round, and looked at it, but only as one looks at things from which one expects nothing, and dislikes the sight of. My eyes merely wandered over it, that is to say: all my heart and attention were given to the one thought, "Why had grandmamma been so cruel as to send me only a walnut?"

"Honor," said my father, peeping at me over the newspaper once more, "unopened parcels must be examined, if people want to know what is inside them."

"I will fetch the crackers then," said I, pettishly.

"Crackers are not needed," remarked my father. "Make your eyes see what they are looking at, Honor."

Now I knew my father never spoke without a meaning, and began to wonder if there was more in the walnut than I had thought. And so, at last, I really looked, and soon detected that the walnut-shell must have been opened before, for in two or three places where the sides met I could have got in the point of a pin between them. A little effort soon separated them, and there, behold ! within the convolutions of each half of the shell lay, not the crisp kernel I knew so well, but white leather neatly tucked in. I laid hold of a little corner bit, and pulled out an exquisitely soft fine French kid glove, ornamented with starry spots.

Oh, the shame that mixed with the joy of that moment ! I ran across the rug, hid my face against my father, and cried. I begged his pardon, and grandmamma's too ; but my father would only laugh. "Only mind, Honor," said he, "that you never again distrust an unopened parcel, when you know the hand it comes from." And I promised I never would ; for in one's youth one does not know how hard some promises are to keep.

But this was not all. When, according to custom, we had taken nurse *her* parcel (grandmamma forgot nobody), and had shown her our own, the one she was most of all struck with was my glove-walnut. Toys and books of every conceivable sort, size, and beauty she had seen again and again ; but, as it so

happened, a walnut with gloves inside never ! She put on her spectacles to examine it, and her exclamations were endless.

" It's wonderful, Miss, it's wonderful ! If it wasn't that seeing is believing, I couldn't believe it—I really couldn't ! " My respect for the gloves and the walnut rose higher and higher. I sat with it on my lap all tea-time, and when I went to kiss my father at night, I had it still in my hand.

" That's right," said he ; " you will never forget that walnut as long as you live, Honor."

As I listened, I opened it out before him, to give him a last peep at its contents. " It's *wonderful*, papa, isn't it ? quite wonderful ! " exclaimed I, rather proud of entering into nurse's grown-up feelings.

" Wonderful ? H'm ! " murmured he ; " not half as wonderful as when the walnut was inside, Honor." He said this rather oddly, I thought. But I concluded he was joking, so I laughed myself.

" The idea of the wonderfulness of a common walnut which one eats ! " cried I.

" Its being common and your eating it, does not prevent its being wonderful, little Honor," was his reply ; " there are many unopened parcels in the world to tell you that, if you do but look into them. There, go to sleep now, and dream of what they can possibly be ! "

I think I never went to bed so much puzzled before.

PART II

AN evening or two afterwards I went down to the library in the "gloaming" for a book. It was on the table by the fire-place, and when I got there, I saw my father in his arm-chair, sitting alone, looking into the firelight. As was our wont in those happy days, when we had yet a father—king and priest—to look up to, I went up to him and kissed his forehead. He took my hand in his, but still sat looking into the fire.

Then a sudden thought struck me. "Papa," said I, "don't you think you could tell me something about those other unopened parcels you talked about? I've so often wondered what they were."

"To be sure!" cried he, rousing up completely. "Sit down, Honor, and I will count you up a dozen at once."

I was on the stool at his feet instantly, my hand still in his.

"To begin with," pursued he, "there is arithmetic, which I heard you abusing so angrily this morning, for being as useless to young ladies as—let me see—as grandmamma's walnut."

"Oh, papa!" I exclaimed. I said not a word more, but, no doubt, my voice sounded very doleful. I had argued hotly with my governess that morning that it was a great waste of time for me to learn arithmetic, "as I was not going to be a shop-girl."

"Never mind, Honor," said my father, "sit still and be happy; we won't mention arithmetic again

as you dislike it so much, though for my own part I own I feel an interest in the faculty which is supposed to distinguish a man from his dog—the faculty of *calculation*, I mean.”

“How, papa?” I asked, for I did not half understand what he meant; only as I was very fond of animals, and of dogs particularly, I wanted to do so if I could.

“Coleridge——” began my father; but then he stopped, and looked inquiringly at me.

“Yes, papa, I *do* know that!” I answered, triumphantly. “Coleridge is the man who wrote the ‘Ancient Mariner.’”

It was my favourite poem, and I knew a great deal of it by heart.

“Very good,” said my father; “well, then, Coleridge, who, as you know from the poem, loved animals as dearly as you do, tells a story he had heard of a dog who lost his master, and, after tracing him down a certain lane, came at last to a place where four roads met. The statement was that the dog hereupon put his nose to the ground, and snuffed two of the three roads he had come up to, but not finding his master’s track on either, dashed down the third road without examination.”

This raised my interest completely. “*Did he really*, papa?” I asked, almost interrupting him.

“That is the very point in dispute,” said my father. “Coleridge thought not. The dog had certainly not learnt his subtraction table, you know, Honor—happy dog! eh?—and therefore could not

know from it that when you take three from four only one remains."

My father paused till I said, " I don't understand, papa."

" Well, Honor," replied he, " don't you see there was first the road along which the dog had traced his master ; then the two roads at which he snuffed where his master had not been. Take these three from the four, and you perceive there was only one road left which the master *could* have gone. Because, take three from four and but one remains. You do perceive that, don't you ? "

" Yes, papa."

" But the question is whether the dog perceived it—whether he calculated as you and I have done who *have* learnt or are learning our subtraction table. Coleridge says not. He says, either the story must have been untrue, or a breeze brought the master's track down the fourth road to the dog's nose without giving him the trouble of stooping to snuff—anything, in short, rather than believe the almost miraculous fact that even the most sagacious of all animals could have calculated arithmetically—*take three from four and one remains.*"

" What do *you* think, papa ? " was my next idea.

" All manner of things at different times," said he, smiling. " Dogs calculate practically though not arithmetically ; and I have come at last to the belief that it is not possible to lay down definitions between reason and instinct. The absence of the power of communicating by speech and writing is hardly

sufficiently considered by philosophers. But certainly animals who cannot be taught their arithmetic tables cannot rank as high among reasonable beings as those who are able to exercise that noble and important——”

“ That will do, papa,” cried I, jumping up, and laying my hand over his mouth ; for I saw a smile coming into the corners of his lips as he said “ noble and important ” in very sonorous tones. “ That will do, papa. You said you wouldn’t say a word more about that nasty arithmetic, and here you’ve brought it all back again through the dog ! ”

“ Well, if I was to begin with a ship I couldn’t help doing the same thing, Honor.”

Once more I felt curious, but scarcely liked to own it.

“ We should never hear again from your uncle at sea, you know, if the Queen passed an Act of Parliament forbidding the use of nasty arithmetic to her loving subjects. No more cockatoos, no more stories of monkeys, no more fans, no more edible birds’ nests——”

“ Oh, don’t, papa, please ! ” cried I ; “ besides, surely ships could go sailing on still.”

“ Ay, sailing on, child,” mused my father, “ sailing on without knowing whither—without a compass, without a chart, without any use from sun and stars—sailing on—say drifting rather, to certain destruction, from accidents or starvation. Is it possible you don’t know Honor, that ships are guided over the trackless oceans by that very faculty of cal-

culatation we have been talking about? It is by a cumulative set of such little simple propositions as take three from four and one remains, add two and two together and they make four, that men make their way over the literally pathless water, as if it were mapped out for them (ay, and they make maps of it afterwards); *calculate* how far thay have come in so many hours, and which way they have come, the mysterious magnet assisting them; and so judge again which way to steer. And thus come trade and civilization and the power of travelling and seeing the wonders of the world. Have I not sometimes heard a little girl named Honoria say she hoped she might see many foreign countries before she died? not to speak of an albatross like that which the miserable ancient mariner shot."

"Oh, yes! and I *do* hope so!" exclaimed I.

"Well, then, when you are on board your first ship, Honor, off on your first voyage, say to yourself in memory of this conversation, 'I have to thank nasty arithmetic for this privilege:' not arithmetic only, of course, dear; but unless there were good little boys in the world to learn that two and two make four, you could certainly not be enjoying the pleasures of a sea-voyage."

"I'm so sorry, papa!" cried I. "I will never call it nasty again!"

"Don't, Honor," answered he, laying his hand on my head and stroking my hair. "Every power of this dear little noddle comes from above and was not given to lie dormant and unused. And all the dif-

ferent sorts of learning and information we are trying to pack into its chambers while memory is young and vigorous, are by no means so many modes of torture devised for the particular annoyance of children, but, on the contrary, so many 'unopened parcels,' the contents of which will one day be the delight of their possessors; however little they may believe this till the time comes when the strings are untied. When that will be in any particular case no one can tell, as no one can foresee the circumstances of his future life. Some of the parcels may not be wanted for years—others never—some directly—almost as soon as stowed away. French verbs, geography, history—every one of these horrors *may* be wanted and called out in turn : and all that parents can do is to get as many such valuable parcels stowed away in a child's brain as the child can be persuaded to admit. Ah, Honor ! some the children are apt to think most useless and uninteresting of all, because most difficult of comprehension, may one day prove to them the greatest treasures of all—'fountains of living waters ; ' " continued my father, lowering his voice, " ' springing up to everlasting life.' "

" Papa," said I, " I guess what you mean : things like the Church Catechism, which one cannot understand——"

" The Catechism is a special instance, I think," said my father. " But you speak vaguely when you say you cannot understand it. Not all of it, of course, for, like most good things, its meaning opens more and more upon one as one's own experience

ripens ; but a great part of it is intelligible to any attentive child, who can learn it by heart and listen to an explanation. But whether understood or not at the time, my cry will always be, *Learn it by heart*. The parcel will open some day. I can tell you a story in point."

I was pleased at the prospect of a story of any kind, and my father began. He told of an old man he had once known, on the verge of eighty, and nearly blind, who had been a church-goer all his life, and even teacher at a Sunday School in his day, but from mistaken scruples had stayed away from the holiest of all rites, the one as specially ordained as baptism—the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The old man, "John" by name, went up to his clergyman one day after morning service was over, and announced that he should like to come next Sunday to the Holy Communion, if he might. But would the clergyman be so good as to tell him what to do, he was so afraid of coming unworthily, or of doing wrong, and so making himself worse ?

"I see the old man now," said my father, "as he stood in his Welsh cap before the clergyman, lifting very nearly sightless eyes to where he thought his pastor's face might be. And what do you think the clergyman did, Honor ? He had not been in the place long, so he knew but little of the old man personally, and he might have said, 'Come to my house and tell me all about yourself, and your past life, and I will explain the responsibilities you incur by approaching the Lord's Table' ; and the two might

have met there accordingly, and argued up and down the mysterious question of fitness and spiritual condition, till the one was helplessly confused and the other disappointed at the impossibility of getting an old man of eighty to follow a train of thought. But no ! a better way suggested itself to the clergyman.

“ ‘ John,’ said he, ‘ you know your Catechism ? ’

“ ‘ Know it, sir, boy and man, these seventy years,’ said old John.

“ ‘ Listen, then, John. *What is required of them who come to the Lord’s Supper ?* ’

“ John lifted even his Welsh cap off his bald pate, and answered at once :—‘ *To examine themselves, whether they repent them truly of their former sins, stedfastly purposing to lead a new life ; have a lively faith in God’s mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death ; and be in charity with all men.*’

“ The parcel had been shut up a long time useless, Honor, but it came open at last. Old John went home without a misgiving. He could say ‘ Amen ’ heartily to all *those* requirements ; and not a bishop in the land could tell him more was necessary. He came to the Lord’s Supper the next Sunday, and continued an habitual communicant till he died.”

I did not speak, for although I thought it an interesting story about old John, I could not all at once reconcile myself to the thought of those tedious answers in the Catechism that had so long been my Sunday’s dread.

My father broke the silence.

"And there are yet other unopened parcels, Honor ; but I do not like to say too much about them. Only this. As I talk to you now, so I was once talked to myself ; but I was impatient, more so than you, my child, a thousand times ; and it was not till the hand of death came between me and my poor mother that I thought seriously of anything she had said. I loved her, however, and my grief was almost indignation, it was so stormy. That was a dark, heavy burden, Honor, but it opened at last into light. My bitter regret for past indifference helped it to do so, perhaps. I taxed my memory to recall what I could never hear again. I got up many a time in the night to put down on paper any words which occurred suddenly to my mind ; and much that I have said to you is but an echo of those old memories. And thus you see, Honor, the words of the poet are no fiction. And it is possible—

' That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things ' ;

that even a fault repented of may lead us to a deeper feeling of right and wrong than we had before."

"Do you really think so, papa ? " I asked ; for the doctrine seemed to me rather different from the tendency of many pretty story-books I had read.

"I *hope* so, at any rate, Honor," said my father ; "but it is too large a subject to begin now. We have sat the fire out. Let us go up to mamma to tea."

* * * * *

"After all, there is one thing you have not ex-

plained, papa," said I, breaking a silence just before bidding good-night. "When I called the walnut-shell with the gloves inside 'wonderful' the first night, you said, 'H'm! not so wonderful as when the walnut was there.' Do you remember?"

My father smiled, "If that puzzles you, Honor, bring me a walnut. We had some at dessert."

I did so, and, after splitting it neatly in two, he showed me the piny pear-shaped germ lying in a tiny hollow between the two halves at the lower end.

"If I were to tell you that every time you eat a common walnut you eat a walnut-tree complete, you would laugh at me, I suppose, Honor; and yet you eat what might have been a walnut-tree, had you not interfered. Yes! there is in that tiny germ all the specific walnut-tree materials, wanting nothing to bring their life into activity, but common earth, common water, common air, and common sunshine—things, all of them, so common that we do not trouble ourselves to ask what they do for us; and yet they effect what we should call miracles, were they not so common! So in their hands that minikin germ would develop into a big tree—ay, and a walnut-tree, and no other sort—its bark, its wood, its leaves, its sap, its flowers, its fruit, the seed within itself after its kind. What do you say now? Remember this when you are inclined to talk of the common walnut one eats as if it was commonplace, and grow rapturous over the little bit of human ingenuity displayed in stuffing a very soft piece of leather neatly into the convolutions of an empty

walnut-shell. . . . I wonder, by the way, Honor, how many walnut-trees you have eaten up in the course of your short life ! ”

The abrupt joke seemed to lighten the seriousness of my surprise, and my father concluded with a farewell kiss : “ These germs are among the thousands of unopened parcels in the natural world, and they shadow out the others ! ”

PART III

Two years ! it sounds a long time to write of, but oh how soon it slips away when the little daily details of life go on uninterrupted by any startling joy or sorrow !

Yes ; it was really two years before my father and I spoke again on the subject of our last conversation, and yet when we did, it came back upon me like a recollection of yesterday.

We had had a few more words about it the very next morning, it is true, but I do not call that conversation. I was running through the hall after lessons, with a flower-pot in one hand and a rake in the other, when the library door opened, and my father’s voice called me in.

I felt in a terrible hurry, and he saw it, but laid a hand on each of my shoulders to enforce attention.

“ One moment, Honor,” said he ; “ just this one ! I have been half afraid that I puzzled you last night, and made you suppose I thought it almost better to have done wrong, if one only repented, than to have

'kept innocence.' Never as long as you live think that, my child. I never meant it."

"No, papa," was all I could answer.

"Only," he continued, "to human beings who are liable to sin every day of their lives it is a comfort unspeakable to believe that even *that* evil may be turned to good; that sin really repented of and borne in our minds as a warning may make us more specially watchful on that special point than we might otherwise have been. That is all, and it is a great deal, but I hope you did not think I meant more than that."

"Papa, I don't think I thought much about it at all afterwards," was my lucid reply to this appeal, as he has often since told me.

He said, "Quite right, Honor," at the time, and smiled, and bade me go and murder my bulbs as fast as I pleased. Whereupon I protested, and he went on to assure me that Lord-Mayor's day, November 9, was the only proper day in the year for the setting of bulbs, and if I persisted in putting them in the ground several weeks earlier—well, he would not be answerable for the consequences.

Now papa was no gardener, as we all knew, and his giving his opinion at all about tulips and crocuses made me laugh. Besides, I couldn't think what the Lord Mayor's show could have to do with our flowers, and said so. But when I rested my flower-pot on a chair to hear his answer, he would give no explanation of the how and the why, only repeated that it was so: he didn't know the inside of *all* the

unopened parcels in the world, he said. On which I laughed again, and ran away to my garden and its easier thoughts.

Two years later grandmamma's parcel contained for me a copy of Longfellow's poems, and before many days were over I had come across his "Ladder of St. Augustine," and the old memories revived as fresh in my mind as a Californian rock rose in water : —the walnut—the long evening with my father—his warning the following day.

I ran downstairs to my happy haunt, the library, and rushed in regardless of ceremony. "Do you remember, papa?" I cried, proud to remember so well myself, and pointed triumphantly to the open page of the book—"there's something about it here, too"; saying which I pushed the volume into his hand. He took it and read, and as he did so a strange feeling seized me of how near the distant past, of which I had not thought for so long, had come to the present. It was like having that other evening over again, only I was conscious of understanding so much better and caring so much more now. Certainly I had not grown into my teens without a change. But I sat on the same seat : in the same place, and the same voice spoke at my side :

"This is the true elixir of hope for poor weak humanity, Honor, if one could but administer it where it is needed. Men need to be saved from self-contempt as well as guilt, or they easily drop from fallibility to recklessness ; and no argument could

be so effectual as this—that sin repented of *may* be the stepping-stone to a more stable holiness than the untried innocence even of another Adam, were that to be had. *May* be is all I dare to say, remember. Whether it *shall* be rests with each individual himself. It is a great truth, and I wish I could spread faith in it to the four quarters of the globe—

‘ That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.’

And those are the words which state it most forcibly to my mind, besides being intimately connected with a very interesting case which I should like to tell you about.”

I edged my stool closer than ever to my father, and he began :—

“ When I was a boy at school my life was saved by a lad a year older than myself, and far out of reach of my acquaintance in school. A party of us were out bathing, and I had sillily struck out beyond our appointed bounds—to peep round a rock or some such nonsense—when an unexpected current carried me away. I battled against it as long as I could alone, for I was ashamed to call for help ; but presently cramp seized me, and then, as you may suppose, I shouted pretty lustily. No one had noticed my disappearance, and they had some difficulty at first in finding out where the cry came from ; but at last the lad I speak of saw me, and swam at once to my rescue. Before he could reach me I was almost exhausted, and yet there is no image more

vividly pictured on my brain even now than that of his face as I saw it in that supreme moment when the sound of his breath was in my ears and I felt his strong arm stretched out to save me. Of what followed I know nothing, but I was told afterwards that it was fortunate for us both that he was unusually powerful; that otherwise our chances of life would have been small.

“It will not surprise *you*, I dare say, Honor,” continued my father, “to hear that after this adventure I was taken with a fit of hero-worship for my preserver. Such attacks—*engouements* the French call them—are not so common among schoolboys as young ladies. Still even schoolboys are not all formed internally to one model, however rigidly they may conform to a style in externals, and my hero-worship was, I assure you, as ardent as any girl’s could be. In my eyes its object was the personification of everything great and noble, both in mind and body, and there was foundation enough for the faith in fact to prevent the charm ever being broken by the rude shock of disappointment. Everybody, as well as myself, thought him a fine fellow, and respected him. With how good reason you may suppose, when I tell you *they do so still*.”

My father paused, and I half jumped from my seat in surprise. Then he was alive; wouldn’t papa tell me who it was: did I know him? etc. I begged very hard, but in vain, and my father continued his account.

“You have heard enough of schools, Honor, to

know that whatever feelings of this, I suppose, *romantic* character I entertained, I had to keep to myself. Anything like friendly intercourse with *him* was out of the question. His only reception of my stammered thanks the day after the accident was, 'Don't be such a little fool again,' accompanied by a grim smile as he turned on his heel. All this was *en règle*, and I knew it, but not the less did I think and sometimes dream of the powerful face with the anxious, earnest eyes, as I had seen them in my extremity above that terrible water. . . . Nay, one day I was punished by a heavy box on the ear from a friend of my hero, for the presumption of having attempted certain sketches of his face on the backs of some exercises. And if unintentional caricaturing deserved punishment, I was rightly served.

"By and by invitations came to him from my father and mother, which one day he accepted; but though, while a visitor among us, the courtesies due from a visitor to his host's family went on in the usual way, our relations on our return to school resumed their old footing. He was unusually forward, I backward, beyond what I ought to have been. The gulf was very wide between us, as my father told me when he parted from me, adding with his last kiss the warning assurance, 'If you want that boy's friendship, you will have to deserve it.' And to cut a long story short, this was what I tried for; and I was so far successful that a day came when my hero and I were associates, and I may say *friends*.

"By that time, though—mournful to relate—the

engouement had so far subsided into rational appreciation that I would no longer have sworn black was white because he said it. So you see I was turning fast into an old fogie. And now that we came into closer contact there was one thing in my hero that puzzled me. Occasionally his thoughts seemed to drift away out of the range of anything or anybody present, and a painful, anxious look came into his eyes, which always reminded me of his face as I saw it on the water. Before I knew him I had noticed this mood, and attributed it to his brain being fixed on some profound and weighty subject of thought. Now it struck me differently. Now I fancied there was some trouble at work within ; but there was a reasonable clue to this, perhaps, in the fact that his mother was a widow left with a large young family to guide and see provided for.

“ The fit of abstraction always passed over quickly, and as unexpectedly as it had come on ; and if one asked in what dreamland he had been wandering for the last few minutes, a smile or a joke turned aside the inquiry. It is a trifle to mention, but it acted as an effectual, though slight, bar to complete intimacy ; and when I joined him at college a year after he had left me at school, the same odd little bit of reserve remained. The old joke, ‘ A penny for your thoughts,’ brought a frown instead of a smile to his face on those occasions. At the University I found my hero utterly unchanged, except as regarded advance of mind. The delicate high-mindedness and scrupulous truthfulness (not over-common

qualities in boy or man) which had been the subject of my profound admiration at school, were equally strongly marked now. They commanded the same respect from old and young.

"And now comes the kernel of my story, Honor," observed my father, who evidently began to think I must be tired of hearing of his model of perfection. "All I have said hitherto was to interest you in the individual. You could not otherwise have cared for what is coming.

"It was the year that 'In Memoriam' came out, and the volume was in the hands of most thinking young men, but, oddly enough, *I* came across it sooner than my friend did, for it was sent to me during the time I was at school without him, and I had been completely carried away in wonder and admiration. Of course in reading anything so noble and great my first thought was of him who could appreciate it so thoroughly. Of course, too, as I read, I fancied a strong resemblance between *my* hero and the subject of Tennyson's lament. Consequently, 'In Memoriam' was one of our first themes of conversation after we met again, and we agreed to go through it together.

"Some days in one's life seem to begin and end in gloom. I do not mean *grief*, but a sort of mental gloom, matching the cloudy day of the physical world on which nothing looks bright. On such days jestings, however innocent, feel out of place, and every train of thought, wherever begun, ends in seriousness. On such a day my friend and I sat

down, late in the evening, to the study of 'In Memoriam,' he reading aloud by my request ; my wish being to watch its effect upon his mind.

" And certainly the plan succeeded. At the very first line of the introductory poem, he stopped and hesitated.

' Strong Son of God, Immortal Love——'

" Here he turned to me with an inquiring look.

" ' It is perfectly orthodox,' I cried, and quoted the translation of an ancient hymn in which the same expression occurs. He nodded assent, smiling, and went on, never *hesitating* again, though he stopped many times to utter admiration or better to understand the sense, which often required careful re-reading.

" One's brain was warm in those days," continued my father, " and by the time we had ended and discussed the introductory poem, an hour had elapsed, and we were both worked up to a high state of mental excitement.

" Then we went on ; he reading as before :—

' I hold it truth with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.'

" When, what was my surprise to see my friend fling the book down, lay his arm on the table, and bury his face upon it ! I called him by name and asked what was the matter.

“ ‘ Do you believe it ? ’ said he.

“ ‘ It ? what ? ’ cried I, for I was too much bewildered about him to be thinking of the book.

“ ‘ That men may rise through sinning, or something like it,’ he answered gruffly. ‘ A man may repent, of course, and that for a lifetime, and he may rise in spite of it ; but it is always a dead weight drawing him back.’

“ ‘ I differ with you,’ said I ; ‘ conceit—that is, self-esteem—is perhaps the widest-spread of all the vices, and, like drunkenness, opens the door to a thousand others. Now suppose the consciousness of some weak point in one’s character, or even of some weak yielding to it wrongly, burnt humility into one’s heart, would not that be a rise ? Besides, the having stumbled may make one keep one’s foot more diligently. God’s mercy is far beyond man’s conception of it. I believe the words fully.’

“ ‘ I wish I could,’ said he, in a weary voice.

“ And then a sudden thought struck me that my dear friend was troubled personally—that, blameless, exalted even, for a lad, as his life had been for years, some old recollection was rankling in his mind. I became composed myself at once.

“ ‘ We read the Scriptures quite differently,’ I observed, quietly. ‘ When it tells us scarlet sins shall be white as snow, I don’t expect a pink stain to remain. You do. I believe the truth of the assurance, though it is spoken metaphor-wise. You do not. I even choose to apply another text to the same subject. “ Though ye have lien among the

pots, yet ye shall be as the wings of a dove that is covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold.”

“ ‘ It don’t do,’ he murmured, moving his head uneasily, but not looking up.

“ ‘ It will not do for you to call yourself my friend on these terms,’ cried I, warmly. ‘ If you had committed murder, I could understand it ; but here for some trumpery nonsense or other you are shutting me out from confidence and yourself from comfort.’

“ ‘ You don’t know that it is nonsense,’ said he.

“ ‘ It is time I knew the truth,’ I answered.

“ ‘ You would despise me as much as I despise myself,’ he objected.

“ ‘ If you despise yourself,’ cried I, vehemently, and striking the table a heavy blow as I spoke, ‘ you are guilty of a heinous sin.’

“ ‘ What in the world do you mean ? ’ he asked ; but at last he was looking up.

“ ‘ I mean that it is downright sin not to be thankful to God for having been able to lead the life you have done for years past ; restraining yourself, and setting an example the value of which will never be known to you till the day of judgment.’ . . .

“ I broke down here, for I thought of the help it had been to myself.

“ ‘ My dear friend ! ’ exclaimed he—and then he broke down too. I had prevailed.

“ And now, Honor,” resumed my father, “ if you were to guess for a hundred years, you could never guess what this trouble of my hero’s was. It was no laughing matter, and yet I know you will smile

when I tell you that he had when a child deceived his family by pretending to see ghosts, and had never *undeceived* them up to that moment."

"Oh, but *why*?" was my natural exclamation.

"Chiefly, because not having done it at the first right moment," answered my father, "he delayed till he couldn't endure to revert to the subject. Sometimes, as he told me, the whole affair seemed such a trifle as not to be worth speaking about, especially after every one else appeared to have forgotten it. At other times it felt to him too dreadful to be spoken of at all! In short, although life went on as usual—and with all young people the enjoyment of life is so strong that it overrules reflection—my poor hero was, as it were, haunted by his own imaginary ghost."

"But, papa, how *could* he do such a thing?" I asked.

"It arose thus," began my father: "he was a nervous, imaginative child, and very restless at night; a very troublesome quality in a nursery, and one which was often getting him into scrapes. One night, not very long after his poor father's death, he awoke in a confused, half-conscious condition as usual, and, as usual, began to cry. As usual, too, came the nurses' remonstrance and orders to be quiet and go to sleep; but these women were themselves the cause that they could not be obeyed. They had left the door which divided the nurseries a little bit open after they put him to bed, and through it he had seen their two heads—one young, one old—

'nodding together' (vizier-like) over their candle on the work-table, as they sat mending socks and chattering. Not planning weddings, however, but unluckily telling half-fledged ghost stories of 'warnings,' 'appearances,' 'knockings,' and so forth; all in connection, of course, with 'poor master's death.' That the child heard what they said very imperfectly did not mend matters. He fell asleep with the sounds of smothered exclamations in his ears: 'Awful, ain't it?' 'You don't say so!' 'Makes me all of a shake,' etc., his last sight being the glimmer of the candlelight on the younger girl's wide-opened eyes, as she stared, respectfully astonished at the nonsense her old goose of a companion was talking.

"No wonder that from a sleep so begun, saddened, too, by the mention of his poor father, my poor friend awoke disturbed and apprehensive, and, staring into the half-darkness of early dawn, was ready to fancy anything that might suggest itself. Accordingly, when ordered to be quiet and go to sleep, he shrieked out, between his sobs, that *he couldn't, for he saw something*.

"Then followed the fact—which, child as he was, he detected in an instant—that these words changed the whole tone of nurse's behaviour. No more scolding now, but petting and coaxing. It was, 'Oh, Master Tommy dear' (we will call him Tommy for the present), 'don't say so, please. There can't be anything, you know; don't fancy such things, there's a good boy,' etc. Nevertheless she hustled out of bed and struck a light, which she carried triumphantly into every corner of the room to prove

to him (and perhaps herself, too) that there really was nothing there. But the 'good boy' could not be pacified so easily. The night-terrors of children, being the result of physical sensations, cannot often be reasoned away. He still *felt* disturbed, and cried accordingly, calling out now from time to time that he saw something. They had furnished this text themselves. Both nurses were up now, and at last one of them asked 'What he saw?' and then came the unhappy answer (also suggested by their chatter) that *he saw papa*.

"The noise had by this time awakened one of the other children, and a little half-roused girl was told confidentially by the younger nurse that 'Master Tommy had seen his poor dear papa, and it would break missus's heart.' 'Poor dear papa!' was all the child answered at the time, for she dropped to sleep again at once; but the next morning Tommy found himself installed in all the privileges and prestige of a *ghost-seer*, though the fact was only spoken of in whispers in the nursery, for little Missy was warned she would make her mamma quite ill if she said one word to her about it.

"This was the beginning of the evil, Honor," continued my father. "Do not expect me to account for its continuance, only observe how easy it is to get *entangled* in wrong-doing. He might have forgotten the night adventure, perhaps, but that the honour of having seen a ghost being thrust upon him by nurse, and he not disclaiming it at once—he in point of fact accepted it. After which retreat was difficult. He

invented no particulars, and never talked about it, it is true, but he never denied it. When his little sister (who had her misgivings) inquired if he had really seen anything, and what—his one answer was that ‘he had seen papa.’ It was the only account he ever gave.

“Thus weeks passed over, and as the child did not fall ill and die, as the nurses expected, the affair of the ghost-seeing was almost forgotten, and nursery discipline going on as before, when suddenly the scene was repeated. Again a restless sleep, again an agitated waking, and again Master Tommy *saw something*: Only on this occasion the disturbance happened before the family were in bed, and the child having got up and rushed into the front nursery screaming after his papa, the noise brought his mother to the door.

“This was the moment,” continued my father, “for which my friend could never forgive himself. He allowed his mother to be deceived!

“The mere sight of her face, he assured me, woke him, young as he was, to a sense that he *was* acting deceitfully, which he had never fully realized before. He could never have said the thing to her, he added. Nevertheless, when nurse came forward and gave her version of all ‘the poor dear child’ had seen and said, he stood by helplessly sobbing till his mother folded him in her arms and consoled him: and so the evil went on. . .

“There! that is the worst!” cried my father, interrupting himself here, and returning the rather

vehement hand-squeeze with which I expressed my indignation at his hero's behaviour. "Now you know how he became a make-believe ghost-seer, Honor. Condemn the offence as much as you please, but let us have no inhuman human judgments upon the offender. Only the One to whom all hearts are open can judge of individual guilt, because He only can measure the amount of conscious responsibility. Who can guess at it even, in the case of a child?" I relaxed my hold of my father's hand here, and stooped to kiss it in silent apology for the unspoken judgment my heart had pronounced. "Looking back upon the past with the self-reproach of a later intelligence," continued my father, "my friend took a terrible estimate of his early transgression! one that would have satisfied even *you*, Honor. Let that suffice. Our interest in the matter is to know what followed—what effect was left upon his mind. Hundreds of well-meaning people in the world, I know, would tell you that there could be but one answer to such a question; that he *must* have turned out ill. What happened really? A few more years, better health—continued Christian training—fitting companionship—turned a puny baby into a strong boy, sound in body as in mind; what came then of the one dark corner in his heart? Because he had been deceitful once, and had not even yet the courage to own it, was he therefore to go on being deceitful more and more? Was the evil to spread like a leprosy over his whole nature? Quite otherwise; quite the reverse even! If his mother had

been asked which, of all her children, was, during the years of his intelligent boyhood, the *most* conscientious, the *most* ready to confess a fault, the one whose word could be *most* implicitly relied upon, she would have named him we have called 'Tommy,' the little rascally ghost-seer of the nursery. 'And I hated myself for being such a hypocrite,' exclaimed my poor friend, after telling me that such was his mother's conviction. Can you guess my answer, Honor? You ought almost to be able," said my father. "I told him that what he called *hypocrisy* was *repentance*—the truest of all repentance—not a mere expression of regret, but an entire change of mind—such an actual dislike of the old infirmity that the faintest approach to it had become detestable. How a man of his reasoning powers had missed recognizing the commonplace truths he now heard from me as a hitherto undiscovered consolation, I cannot imagine. Perhaps justice was better satisfied—perhaps his character was ripened more effectually—by the pain he went through: pain and annoyance too. Imagine him, for instance, with his keenly awakened sensitiveness, exposed to being reminded, sometimes jestingly, sometimes seriously, by his brothers and sisters, of the abhorred hoax, as if it had been truth! The very mention of the word 'ghosts,' he assured me, filled him with horror in those days, living in dread as he did of some personal allusion. 'By-the-bye, Tommy, *you're* the one to tell us all about ghosts. I wonder why yours has left off coming,' etc. His only resource, and it was a miserable one, was to

turn angry, and bid them not talk nonsense. In this way he did succeed at last in checking these allusions, but it was pain and grief to him, a burden upon his spirit, young and happy as he was otherwise. Yet, by God's grace, he rose instead of sinking under it, though he suffered what I should be sorry to hear of any one dear to me suffering again. St. Augustine's ladder is a hard one to climb by, Honor. Thrice happy those to whom the steps are not so steep as they were to my dear friend! The great fact remains, however, that *up them* he reached a scrupulousness of conscience he *might* not have aimed at but for the hateful sense of the infirmity by which he had once fallen.

"The oddest thing of all," pursued my father, "was, that up to almost the last moment of giving me this account my hero was perfectly unconscious of *this* part of the lesson it taught. I literally had to 'point the moral and adorn the tale' myself by asserting its glorious confirmation of those words of Tennyson, which he had begun by disputing! Nor can I ever forget the triumphant delight with which I first saw his old view of himself waver and fall.

"'But how am I to shake off the black dog who *will* jump on my back when I think of it?' he objected.

"'Turn him a beautiful sky-blue,' cried I (alluding to a story of a witty child who said he had done so when he recovered his temper), 'by *telling your mother.*' His countenance fell for one brief moment. 'What *will* she think of me? That's dreadful.' 'What do *I* think of you,' cried I, 'who am only your friend?' The argument was unanswerable

and when that was settled, and I had boldly told him he stood before me a living example of what Tennyson had proclaimed to all the world as a truth *he* believed in, my hero was convinced : a fact I discovered most conclusively by his turning the tables on me and pretending to be amused at my eagerness. And then there broke over his face that happy smile, the like of which I never saw on human face but his——”

“ You forget Uncle Frederick’s, papa,” said I here, interrupting him.

“ No,” replied my father, “ I do not. It is your Uncle Frederick I am thinking of at this moment. My dear friend and your dear uncle are one and the same person.”

I almost shrieked with amazement.

“ And it was Uncle Frederick who saved you from drowning, and married your sister ? ” I asked

My father assented by a nod.

“ And was that the way he became a great man ? ” I asked next.

“ By marrying my sister ? ” inquired my father, smiling.

“ No, papa : by fighting so hard to be honest and true, I meant.”

“ I shall say ‘ Yes ’ to that, Honor,” was my father’s reply, “ let the world say what it will ; for he could not have been a great man otherwise. Clever men without honesty are charlatans, and are sure to break down in some way or other at last. It is a glorious thing—far past all other glories in this world—to be trustworthy in every word and action of your life, child ! ”

We were silent for a few moments ; then,

“ It’s quite a romance,” was my conclusion.

“ And something more,” put in my father.

“ Every true story of humanity has a moral wrapped up in it, whether people care to extract it or not. If the good people are made happy at last, we are encouraged to follow their example. If they suffer wrongfully with patience, they add so many more to the hosts of witnesses who, ‘ for the joy set before them,’ have ‘ despised ’ earthly shame and sorrow. Now, Honor, open this parcel of mine and tell me what is to be seen inside it. What do *you* think my story of Uncle Frederick teaches ? ”

I thought about it a few minutes, and then blundered out my ideas.

“ Well, of course, to begin with, it teaches what Mr. Tennyson says, you know, papa—‘ *That men,*’ and all that ; because Uncle Frederick turned his—if you please let me call it fault—he was so *very* little !—into a ladder of St. Augustine.”

Papa made no reply, perhaps guessing from my voice that I had something else to say. But I could not say it where I was. I got up and, big as I was, slipped on his knee, put my arms round his neck, and whispered in his ear—

“ And then I ought to try and do the same ; and I intend, papa—I do indeed. When I am going to be very cross I shall try and remember how hot-tempered I have been, and that if I watch against it very hard, perhaps, I may be actually good-tempered some day, and then I shall have got up by *my* ladder.”

“By the grace of God you will,” answered my father, as he returned my embrace. “And now we have got both moral and application to our story.”

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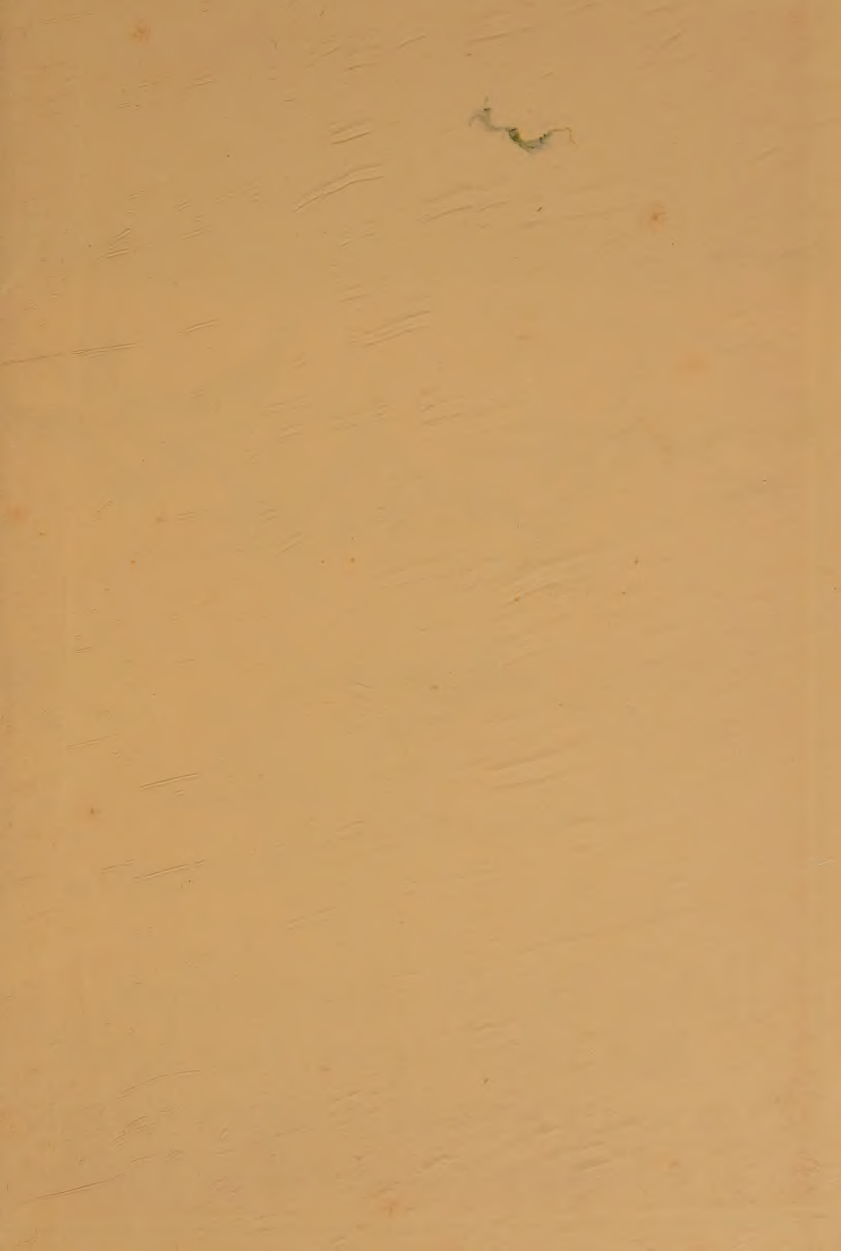
“Just one thing more, papa,” I whispered, a few minutes afterwards. “What did his mother say when he told her?”

“Oh, haven’t I mentioned that?” cried my father. “She said, ‘I have suspected as much for years. Now I know it. Kiss me, my darling.’”

“Then she was not angry a bit, papa?”

“How could she be, with such a son, Honor? That he was what he was, was enough for her—is always enough for a parent. Out of which fact comes the ‘larger hope,’ that such love is but the adumbration of the love and mercy of the Father in heaven.”







Nature the old Nurse, took
The child upon her knee,
Saying: "Here is a story-book,
Thy Father has written for thee."



